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The Open University, Music Department

Regionalist Themes in 'Breton' Operas, 1850–1954:  
Four Case Studies



A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Jennifer Janice Millar

Cert Ed, BA (Hons)

2010





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Jean Brunet (1908), *La Bretagne*, oil on canvas, Musée des beaux arts, Quimper

## ABSTRACT

### Regionalist Themes in ‘Breton’ Operas, 1850–1954: Four Case Studies

This thesis aims to challenge the suggestion that *couleur locale*, in nineteenth-century French operas which incorporated Breton themes, was merely a convenient vehicle for spectacle. It seeks to demonstrate that the deployment of regional symbolism served a variety of complex personal, psychological and socio-political needs and was complicit in the establishment of new regional and national musical identities.

Four case studies are at the heart of the enquiry: Édouard Lalo’s *Le Roi d’Ys* (1888), Joseph-Guy Ropartz’s *Le Pays* (1912) and Sylvio Lazzari’s *La Lépreuse* (1912) and *La Tour de feu* (1928). Two additional works, Giacomo Meyerbeer’s *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* (1859) and Paul Le Flem’s *Magicienne de la mer* (1954) frame the main study and define it aesthetically and chronologically. These works were all selected to facilitate the comparison of specific regionalist responses by both non-Breton and native Breton composers.

The evaluation of the ways in which regional symbols and themes were deployed in those Breton operas refers to current identity theories and makes extensive use of relevant iconography. Whilst the musical scores are central to the enquiry, close reference is equally made to the literary sources which informed the libretti of the operas. The links between these sources, the significant folklore of the region and the regionally-canonical works of Hersart de la Villemarqué, Émile Souvestre and Anatole Le Braz are assiduously traced. The case studies reveal hitherto undetected or unacknowledged libretti sources; however the interrogation of the operas by Sylvio Lazzari also records previously-undiscovered musical borrowings which have significance for the regional symbolism which his works project.

Finally, the conclusion sets the evidence from the case studies in the context of the role of Breton symbolism in the active preservation or invention of a unique regional heritage and, paradoxically, in the affirmation of an overarching national identity. It demonstrates conclusively that operas which consciously deployed Breton *couleur locale* thereby achieved distinct artistic and psychological goals and continued to evolve in response to their shifting socio-political contexts.

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The translations within the thesis are my own unless otherwise stated.

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## The Breton Cultural Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century France

‘L’unité se fait toujours brutalement.’<sup>1</sup>

‘Solennellement chassée du paradis national par la grande porte, au nom de l’intangible unité de la patrie, voilà la diversité française qui rentre effrontément par la fenêtre.’<sup>2</sup>

The assertion by the American social scientist Cynthia Enloe that ethnic feeling responds to a fundamental need for human identity and can form ‘a basis for social relationships more enduring and less instrumental than occupation, status and legal right’ is particularly relevant to the examination of regionalism in the artefacts of nineteenth-century France.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, regionalism can most usefully be defined as the deployment of regionally-specific references within an art form in such a way that any response which it elicits is dependent for its maximum effect on the particular setting of the work, rather than being incidental to it. Yet, whilst regionally-defined French operas of the period under consideration are frequently said to employ *couleur locale* (local colour), the use of this term, whilst it acknowledges the presence of regional symbols, dilutes the relevance and significance that such works may have transmitted. In this study, four main operas — Édouard Lalo’s *Le Roi d’Ys*, Joseph-Guy Ropartz’s *Le Pays* and Sylvio Lazzari’s *La*

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<sup>1</sup> [‘Unity is always achieved brutally.’]

Ernest Renan (1823–1892) ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ Conférence à la Sorbonne, 11 March 1882. <<http://iaboc.free.fr/balises> (Accessed 30 March 2005).

<sup>2</sup> [‘Ceremoniously ousted from the front entrance of the national paradise in order to secure the unassailable unity of the fatherland, behold French diversity audaciously sneaking in again through the window.’]

Philippe Martel, ‘Le Félibrige’ in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols, Pierre Nora, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), III, 3550.

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Ethnic Conflict and Political Development* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), p. 268.

*Lépreuse* and *La Tour de feu* —, and two ‘framing’ works — Giacomo Meyerbeer’s *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* and Paul Le Flem’s *Magicienne de la mer* — are evaluated in order to explore the deeper musical and social significance of the Breton regional symbols which they deploy.

## **The Historical Background**

The study of nineteenth-century regionalism, whether relating to Brittany or, indeed, to any other locale within France, nevertheless presents a paradox which emerges from the delicate balance between decentralization and ethnic nationalism. A shifting of administrative, socio-economic or artistic control away from the capital would seem to facilitate the promotion of regionalism. The historian Denis Gontard has, however, defined ‘décentralisation théâtrale’ (theatrical decentralisation) as ‘toute tentative pour faire connaître à l’ensemble d’un pays le théâtre de qualité jusque-là réservé à certaines villes privilégiées’ (any attempt to acquaint the entire population with quality theatre which has hitherto been the prerogative of certain privileged cities.)<sup>4</sup>

This definition, however, implies the export of Parisian cultural values to less privileged regions; it assumes the need for cultural colonization rather than the re-evaluation of regional worth. Ironically, moreover, Breton regionalism, in its earliest emanations, was centred on Paris; it was exercised by, and rewarded, those particular ‘exiled’ Bretons, both intellectuals and notables, for whom the discovery of ethnic identity served specific needs. In addition, the political directives from central

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<sup>4</sup> Denis Gontard, *La Décentralisation théâtrale en France 1895–1952*. (Paris: SEDES, 1973), p. 13.

government that seemed to augur well for new growth in ethnic esteem were often, in fact, directed towards bringing the regions under increasing central control. Complex interrelationships between state intervention and ethnic re-evaluation thus provoked underlying tensions that incited the flourishing of a new valorisation of the traditions, dialects and individual characteristics of specific locales.

Enloe has further noted that ethnicity frequently functions as a 'major lever for forcing doubts about modernity into the open'.<sup>5</sup> Nineteenth-century France, given the turmoil of home and foreign affairs and concomitant rate of political and economic change, was inevitably menaced by modernity; the Revolution had placed the locus of power with the people and yet subsequent manifestations of empire or monarchy, followed by the Franco-Prussian War and set against the backdrop of a delayed, but nonetheless encroaching, industrialization, had ensured that while Brittany remained intellectually and materially isolated as a region, central hegemony was subject to destabilizing cultural shifts. Breton notables who rehearsed their ethnic identity in Paris, rather than in Rennes or Nantes, were thus able to present their region as a bastion of rural calm untouched by the scourges of modernity.

One of the most striking aspects of the birth of 'Bretonism' arose from the alliance of Brittany with other Celtic nations and from a willingness to re-evaluate ancient historical links that enabled the region to draw on the cultural traditions of regions and kingdoms beyond the boundaries of Brittany itself. Thus the appearance between 1760 and 1763 of the poems of the Gaelic poet Ossian, translated into English by James Macpherson, not only stimulated an unprecedented vogue for all things Celtic

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<sup>5</sup> Enloe (1986), p. 274.

throughout Europe but also more specifically focussed attention on the Celtic inheritance that had arguably shaped Brittany. The interest in folklore triggered by the 'discovery' of the epic poems of Ossian also presaged a re-evaluation of regional identities and their interaction with the legitimizing forces of the nation-state and further enabled the pursuit of new directions within the arts:

It is no exaggeration to say that the poems of Ossian are not just the key to European Romanticism — with its emphasis on individual sensibility and the sense of loss associated with a glorious past — but the key also to the beginnings of interest in a collective cultural history and tradition [...]. It is with Ossian, in fact, that we glimpse the stirrings of a fascination with orality, the evidence for oral composition and performance, along with the more controversial issue of authenticity, identity and the creative uses of folklore.<sup>6</sup>

This dissemination of interest in Gaelic poetry was fortuitously followed in 1764 by the publication of the sixth volume of the *Antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines* by the Comte de Caylus, which alerted the world to the existence of the standing stones of Carnac and Locmariaquer'.<sup>7</sup> Although the Breton megaliths were acknowledged by Caylus to predate any Celtic association, contemporary *celtomanie* allowed them to be hailed as 'les plus célèbres monuments celtiques de la France.'<sup>8</sup> The background to the Breton cultural renaissance had thus been established, although the movement remained largely undeveloped until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Yet if, under the *ancien régime*, regionalism remained an untapped source, then the years of the Revolution followed by Napoleon's entry into Paris in 1799 saw the

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<sup>6</sup> J. Porter, "'Bring me the head of James MacPherson': the execution of Ossian and the wellsprings of folkloristic discourse", *Journal of American Folklore*, 114 (2001), p. 397.

<sup>7</sup> Comte de Caylus, (1752–67) *Recueil d'Antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises* (Paris). See Jean -Yves Guimard, 'Le Barsaz Breiz' in Pierre Nora, ed. (1997), III, 3479.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3479.

['... the most famous Celtic monuments in France.']

events that gave birth to ethnic re-evaluation. The short-lived moves towards administrative decentralisation evident in the 1791 Constitution were almost as swiftly called into question during The Convention. Struggle for supremacy between centralised state power and the regions, moreover, ultimately posed a threat to national stability: 'La cohésion du territoire national étant la condition de la survie de la Révolution, toute affirmation de particularité devient mortifère pour la nation tout entière.'<sup>9</sup> In establishing this schism between capital and region, the Revolution unwittingly initiated not only the climate that gave birth to regionalism, but also provided the backdrop against which regionalism flourished.

Moreover, the notion that national survival necessitated dependence on centralisation prevailed throughout the nineteenth century and disseminated the paternalist premise that, governed by an enlightened central power, the regions represented the last sanctuary of unsophisticated, backward modes of existence.

La nation étant non seulement contrainte d'unité, mais aussi urgence de devenir, sa construction renvoie le particulier dans un passé périmé. Cela non plus n'est pas nouveau. Les descriptions de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle insistent à l'envi sur le caractère rétrograde et archaïque des particularités locales, condamnées à terme par l'homogénéisation croissante du territoire français.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in 1794, the Convention Nationale, faced with establishing national cohesion, turned its attention towards the national language and towards minority dialects and languages. L'Abbé Grégoire (1750–1831), the cleric and humanitarian who was later

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<sup>9</sup> ['Since the survival of the Revolution depended on national cohesion, any expression of individuality came to be seen as a deadly threat to the entire nation.']

Thierry Gasnier, 'Le Local, Une et divisible' in Pierre Nora, ed. (1997), III, 3426.

<sup>10</sup> ['Since the nation was not merely forced into unification, but was also desperate to become a unified entity, its birth dismissed individual character to the outdated past. This was nothing new. Descriptions from the end of the eighteenth century repeatedly mention the archaic and retrospective nature of regional characteristics, condemned to death by the growing uniformity of the French nation.'] Ibid., p. 3426.

best known for his progressive attitudes towards slavery, coloured minorities and Jews, was charged with the responsibility of reporting on the state of the national language.<sup>11</sup> In spite of the Abbé's obvious commitment to human rights, his survey into the disparate languages spoken within France's home borders was influenced by the current Jacobin political climate and his own Enlightenment ideals. From the outset, the specific questions posed to the regions concerning local linguistic usage betrayed the notion that local dialects were suspected of being the repository of all that was retrogressive, anti-religious and indecent. Typical questions were:

A-t-il (i.e. le patois) beaucoup de termes contraires à la pudeur ? Ce que l'on doit inférer relativement à la pureté ou à la corruption des mœurs ? Prêchait-on jadis en patois ? Cet usage a-t-il cessé ?<sup>12</sup>

One question, moreover, was direct and sinister:

Quelle serait l'importance religieuse et politique de détruire entièrement le patois ? Quels en seraient les moyens ?<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the Abbé's enquiry, an estimated six out of twenty-eight million French citizens were categorized as being ignorant of the 'national' language and only three million were designated as exclusively French-speaking. Regional variations in dialect and language thus contravened the Jacobin concept, soundly based on political expediency, of ideological unification. Moreover, particular languages were specifically targeted for vilification. The Député Barère de Vieuzac (1755–1841), speaking in the name of The Comité de Salut Public (Committee for State Security) on 27 January 1794 declared:

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<sup>11</sup> Grégoire was responsible for the 'Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs' (1787). He promoted anti-slavery legislation in 1794.

<sup>12</sup> ['Does it (the local dialect) use many terms that offend against decency? Can either the purity or decline of moral behaviour be in any way attributed to it? Was preaching once done in the local dialect? Has this custom ceased?']

<sup>13</sup> ['What would be the religious and political impact of destroying the dialect altogether? How could this be effected?']

Hervé Luxardo, 'L'Abbé Grégoire en guerre contre les "Patois"' in *Les Clefs pour l'Histoire*, 1 (2000), p. 5.

Le fédéralisme et la superstition parlent bas-breton; l'émigration et haine de la République parlent allemand. La Contre-révolution parle l'italien et le fanatisme parle basque. Cassons ces instruments de dommage et d'erreurs.<sup>14</sup>

Local dialects and minority languages were thus collectively epitomized as a threat to national progress and security; Corsican was designated Italian, the linguistic practice of Alsace was perceived as German, and Breton was associated with separatism and heretical credulity. Barère's call for the annihilation of linguistic diversity can thus be understood as a 'centralising' strategy which demanded uniformity based on linguistic norms practiced in the capital and decreed by the state. This attempted suppression of local languages had profound implications for the growth of regionalism and for its manifestations within the arts.

The battle lines had been drawn: local communities were under threat in that area which most revealed their individuality, their language. Under the *ancien régime*, the use of patois had remained a largely unquestioned facet of provincial life. However the vilification of ethnic diversity had two far-reaching consequences for the manifestations of regionalism in opera. The first concerned the inevitable regional counterattacks in defence of local language practices and the subsequent cultural re-evaluations based on nascent esteem for particular dialects and ethnic minority languages. The second consequence of this suppression unwittingly stemmed from the definition of a cultural chasm between that which was regional, particular and provincial and that which was of the capital, sophisticated, urbane and progressive.

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<sup>14</sup> ['Federalism and superstition speak low Breton; emigration and hatred of the Republic speak German. The Counter-Revolution speaks Italian and fanaticism speaks Basque. Let us destroy these harmful and misguided tools.']  
Ibid., p. 1.

Paris, as Eugen Weber's study of French culture notes, was, at the time of the Third Republic 'the place where things could be done, where men could get on, *la foire sur la place* of a myriad of social, economic, and cultural activities.'<sup>15</sup> From the standpoint of the apparent cultural superiority of the capital, the artistic patrimony of the regions would have, henceforward, an ambivalent role to play:

Ethnic identity can be a building block but also a potential stumbling block on the road to modernity. On the one hand, the sentiments of ethnic groups are considered drags on modernization. They are said to divert energies, fragment the nation-state and conserve irrational patterns of behaviour. On the other hand [...] ethnicity has been the cornerstone of nationalism.<sup>16</sup>

Paradoxically, interest in the cultural legacy of the regions thus functioned equivocally as a means of reinforcing central nationalism and as an escape from the menace of modernity. The nation-state could measure its linear historical progress by the distance it had travelled from the ethnic roots which constituted its fragmented past, but could, nonetheless, counter the pressures of rapid social and economic change by indulging in a particular nostalgia which identified the regions as treasuries of all that was bizarre and 'other' and yet equally rooted in the familiar. The publications which demonstrated renewed artistic and literary interest in Brittany and which proliferated some thirty years on from Abbé Grégoire's enquiry proved, moreover, to be the fertile ground from which it is possible to trace important elements of many of the libretti of 'Breton' operas.

The Breton artistic renaissance was, in addition, promoted by the cultural contest which, in emphasizing a meridional divide, cast the region as the polar opposite of its

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<sup>15</sup> Eugen Weber, *My France: Politics, Culture, Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> Enloe (1986), p. 3.



southern counterpart. Such debates, as Philippe Martel notes ‘opposent un Midi médiéval, tolérant, démocrate, progressiste, raffiné, à un Nord barbare, fanatique, féodal, arriéré.’<sup>17</sup> French, the central language of government, of learning and of social progress had long been invested with cultural legitimacy by etymological claims that it derived uniquely from Latin and that the classical heritage of the South and Provence was its privileged primogenitor. Moreover, the Provençal philologist François-Juste-Marie Raynouard (1761–1836), whose research into the origins of the French language had linked it to the literary output of troubadours of the eighth to the twelfth centuries, had effectively established the literary pedigree of the South of France.<sup>18</sup> The political economist Sismondi was thus lavish in his approbation of the historical cultural contribution of those French provinces which bordered the Pyrenees:

[...] leur langue était le provençale, et c’était alors la plus cultivée de l’Europe, la plus harmonieuse, la plus propre à la poésie. [...] enfin dans ce pays, qui semblait marcher en avant de toute l’Europe, l’esprit d’examen s’était réveillé de bonne heure; il avait repoussé les anciennes superstitions.<sup>19</sup>

In establishing an apparently conclusive link between Romance languages, the troubadours and courtly love, Raynouard nevertheless associated the South with a history of cultural sophistication and literary merit which tended to isolate the ‘Celtic

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<sup>17</sup> [‘... contrast a mediaeval Midi, tolerant, democratic, progressive and refined with a barbaric North that was fanatical, feudal and backward.’]

Philippe Martel, ‘Le Félibrige’ in Pierre Nora, ed. (1997), III, 3521.

<sup>18</sup> François-Juste-Marie Raynouard, *Eléments de la grammaire romane* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1816). The elevated status that the South enjoyed in intellectual circles was further intensified by further investigation into the lays of the troubadours. In 1816 and 1817 respectively, Raynouard published *Recherches sur l’antiquité de la langue romane*, and *La grammaire des troubadours*. ‘Œuvres de François-Juste-Marie Raynouard’,

<<http://www.academiefrancaise.fr/immortels/base/academiciens> (Accessed 2 April 2005).

<sup>19</sup> [‘... their language was Provençal, and it was the most cultivated (language) in Europe, the most harmonious, the most suited to poetry. [...] in this country which seemed to be in advance of the whole of Europe, the spirit of enquiry had awoken early; it had brushed aside the old superstitions.’]

Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Précis de l’histoire des Français* (1821–44), p. 311.

Gallica <<http://www.visualiseur.bnf.fr>> (Accessed 31 March 2005).

fringe' that Brittany had come to embody and to cast it as the farthest outpost of the Hexagon.

The anthropologist Ivo Strecker, in an examination of post-war responses to German regional identity, has argued that a distinction can be made between 'hard' and 'soft' regionalisms. 'Soft' regionalism, in his view, is:

[...] a spin-off of affluence. It is the rediscovery of the value of individual places and their traditions, and it has developed as a reaction to the shortcomings of internationalism and modernism. At the heart of 'soft' regionalism lies the desire to preserve the quality of the environment and discover or rediscover meaningful local styles of life.<sup>20</sup>

The 'soft' regionalism that took the Midi as its focus neither threatened the central seat of power nor consciously opposed principles of social unification, since, as the established cradle of French language and civilization, the South occupied a unique and intimate place in the central national consciousness.

When the Félibrige, the literary movement formed by seven Provençal poets, chief amongst whom was the poet Mistral, was founded in 1854, amongst its listed objectives was the intention to rekindle ethnic interest throughout South West France by restoring the local language to prominence through poetry. 'Soft' Southern regionalism could envisage a future in which its own ethnic language could develop and prosper beyond its regional confines.<sup>21</sup> Since the historical pedigree of the language had been established, it could generate innovative works that were not wholly reliant on nostalgia. Mistral's *Mireio*, the pastoral poem in Provençal, which later became the basis for the French libretto of Gounod's *Mireille*, was thus issued unashamedly as a new work. Securely sustained by an established history, the

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<sup>20</sup> Ivo Strecker, 'Soft and hard regionalism', *Sociology and Ethnology Bulletin*, 1 (1994), pp. 47–52.

<sup>21</sup> See also Andrea N. Musk, *Aspects of regionalism in French music during the Third Republic: the Schola Cantorum, d'Indy, Séverac and Canteloube* (University of Oxford, 1999).

Provençal language provided its contemporary literary cognoscenti with the means to effect its continuing evolution and to achieve the consequent hegemonic assimilation of its symbolisms. The enthusiastic reception of those regionally-defined works was guaranteed.<sup>22</sup>

In comparison, the Breton literary works of the nineteenth century that found their way into opera libretti arrived via a more tortuous route and were themselves ultimately implicated in the resurgence of what Strecker designates as 'hard' regionalism. The characteristics of 'hard' regionalism relate to a reaction to central power — 'the problem of transforming the procrustean bed of centralism.'<sup>23</sup> Brittany, denied the cultural legitimacy of the South, encountered the full force of central procrustean energy directed at the suppression of its language; the literary works which resulted testify to the presence of 'hard' regionalism. They continue to provoke polemic and persist as 'the breviary of the Breton patriot'.<sup>24</sup>

However, the reasons for Brittany's failure in the nineteenth century to carve a cultural niche for itself that could rival that of the South were diverse. Early travelogues that dealt with the region were inaccurate, even for a time when research methodology was, by modern standards, in its infancy. The writer Émile Souvestre, in his introduction to *Les Derniers Bretons*, cites examples of ludicrous inaccuracies and extravagant claims relating to Brittany in nineteenth-century travel writing as the rationale for providing an accurate picture of the region:

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<sup>22</sup> Evidence of interest in the South and Provence can be detected in the enthusiastic reception of Alphonse Daudet's *Lettres de mon Moulin* (1866); it self-consciously presented an epistolary narrative in which short stories about charmed Southern rural life appeared as letters sent from the author in Provence to Parisian friends.

<sup>23</sup> Strecker (1994), p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> C. Danio, *Histoire de Bretagne* (Rennes : Editions P.A.B., 1929), p.35.

Ainsi, M. Hippolyte Bonnelier nous apprenait que dans l'île de Sein l'usage existait de lapider les jeunes filles qui avaient des amants; que les tailleurs du Finistère étaient les continuateurs des druides, et parlaient une langue particulière qui était du 'grec altéré'.<sup>25</sup>

Brittany had thus become a victim of misinformed publicity. Whilst dilettante travellers in search of quaint and quirky diversions might have been tempted to abandon the capital to discover for themselves the curiosities they had been led to expect, the chasm dividing 'spin' and reality inevitably constituted an affront which prohibited reasoned re-evaluation of the region's possible attractions:

Alors toutes leurs belles espérances se sont évanouies; les réalités ont éteint leur enthousiasme. Le Moyen Age, sans rouge, leur a fait mal au cœur. Ils se sont crus tombés au milieu d'un peuple sauvage de l'Orénoque : ils ont crié vers leur cher Paris, comme des enfants après la maison paternelle ; et tout épouvantés encore, ils se sont jetés dans la diligence qui devait les ramener à ce centre classique de toute civilisation.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond the savage irony of Souvestre's catalogue of cultural and geographical errors lies a bitter paradox. Brittany, in its comparative proximity to the 'civilized centre' of the nation, was more accessible to the determined traveller than the relatively distant South. The possibility of disillusionment was thus potentially increased and the schism between the imagined 'other' and the tangible reality more easily made manifest. In addition, the intrepid voyager passing through the Southern provinces

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<sup>25</sup> ['So M. Hippolyte Bonnelier informed us that in the Île de Sein there used to be a custom of stoning young girls who had taken lovers; that the tailors of Finistère were descended from the Druids and spoke a special language which was "modified Greek".']

Émile Souvestre (1836) *Les Derniers Bretons* (Rennes: Terre de Brume, 1997), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> ['So all their wonderful hopes vanished; hard reality extinguished their enthusiasm. The Middle Ages, without any colourful retouching, brought heartache. They thought that they had fallen amongst a wild tribe from the Orinoco: they cried out for their beloved Paris like (lost) children for the family home; and still in a state of shock, they threw themselves into the coach which would carry them back to the accepted centre of the whole of civilization.']

Souvestre (1997), p. 25.

could perceive the visual heritage of classical civilization. The South could thus present itself as a first staging post on the Grand Tour and the route to the acquisition of culture and learning.

In comparison, in the early years of the nineteenth century, Brittany had been effectively severed from any sense of cultural cohesion with the national centre and the artistic life of the nation. Denied the status of any accepted contribution to France's linguistic history and unable to put forward any strong historical literary contender to rival the Southern troubadours, its own language and culture were seriously under threat. Ethnic survival in the province thus demanded not merely a sustained struggle for survival — the pursuit of 'hard' regionalism — but also the establishment of regional validity and cultural credibility.

Thus, as the restored monarchy of 1830's France sought to reconcile the upheavals consequent on the rapid rate of socio-political change wrought between revolution, empire and monarchy, Breton intellectuals began a determined scrutiny of, and research into, all that they perceived as noteworthy in their ethnic patrimony. The Breton regionalist response to violent cultural change was threefold. It sought primarily to record a way of life whose very existence seemed to be menaced and thus was in danger of disappearing; it then attempted to establish and assert the cultural and historical values of that provincial life and defined Brittany as a separate ethnic unit with a racial inheritance that united it to Celtic nations beyond the boundaries of the unified nation. Finally, it took upon itself the mission of promoting the region in such a way that its appeal would be transmitted to the capital, since

ironically, only the light of central hegemonic approval radiating from Paris outward would ensure the region's cultural survival.

## **Theoretical Frameworks and Debates**

The German sociologist Heinz Becker has commented on the tendency of librettists to use historical plots in order to deploy 'local colour' to inspire costumiers, set-designers, composers and choreographers and has indicated that any apparent social commentary in such works was incidental.<sup>27</sup> This viewpoint implies a strong link between local colour and spectacle, so that any deployment of regionalist references within an opera might appear to be ephemeral to its main artistic content. Although André Spies acknowledges the potential of opera to transmit ethical, social and political ideas indirectly, he nevertheless argues that 'prejudice against overt social commentary did hinder the opera from dealing with transient political issues except as "local colour"'.<sup>28</sup> Spies thereby implicates regional symbolism in the passive transmission and reception of socio-political subtexts in response to cultural and aesthetic demands for novel spectacle.

Yet, when the regional references within an art form relate to locales within the country of origin, to the familiar 'other', rather than to far-flung realms, then the possible function of its symbolism in the process of active interventionism demands close scrutiny. Jane Fulcher has demonstrated convincingly that French Grand Opera, for all its spectacle and bombast, was inextricably bound up with the political life of

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<sup>27</sup> Heinz Becker, ed., *Die 'Couleur locale' in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1976) Quoted in André Michael Spies, *Opera State and Society in the Third Republic, 1875–1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 5–6.

<sup>28</sup> Spies (1998), p. 6.

the nation and with notions of national identity: '[...] the Opéra served a subtle political function, one of a complex nature that affected the repertoire on several different levels at once.'<sup>29</sup> Since 'Breton' operas were inspired by those polemical literary works on which the Breton Nationalist movement was founded,<sup>30</sup> the extent to which their regional or ethnic-national references addressed specific socio-political concerns which impinged upon the image of the province and the nation as a whole is likely to be significant for this enquiry.

Enloe, however, recognizes that:

[...] ethnicity equips an individual with a sense of belonging; it positions him in society. As social relations become complex and impersonal, ethnic identity may be grasped tenaciously. It is a familiar anchor in a climate of turbulence and uncertainty.<sup>31</sup>

However, the composers whose works are evaluated here represent three defined groups: those who were Breton by birth (Joseph Guy Ropartz and Paul Le Flem); those who had links with the region through marriage or other social contacts (Édouard Lalo and Sylvio Lazzari); and, finally, Giacomo Meyerbeer, whose association with Brittany was tenuous. The manner in which indigenous composers 'tenaciously grasped' their actual cultural birthright in comparison with non-Breton composers, who equally sought the 'anchor' of 'adopted' ethnicity will inevitably inform this study.

More significantly, the extent to which each of the operas and their individual composers and librettists complied with, or legitimized, the aesthetic or socio-

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<sup>29</sup> Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 201–2.

<sup>30</sup> See p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Enloe (1986), p. 15.

political imperatives of centralized national culture or, in contrast, to which they resisted its demands, will be central to the enquiry. Evidence of the undertow of cultural separatism which became an increasingly prevalent response to the post-revolutionary imposition of cultural and linguistic conformity might, for example, be expected to emerge in the works of indigenous composers and librettists. This combative reclamation of Breton cultural patrimony was reflected in the aims of the Association des Compositeurs Bretons (Association of Breton Composers) which sought to: 'créer un mouvement autonome de musique bretonne [...] et de regrouper les quelques musiciens bretons qui (font) œuvre nationale.'<sup>32</sup> Of the composers who are represented here, it is significant that the native Breton composer, Paul Le Flem, was a founder member of this organization, whilst his compatriot, Joseph Guy Ropartz, was the honorary president.

However, the social scientist Manuel Castells suggests that identities which resist the legitimizing forces of the state do not remain forever intransigent, but frequently promote modified 'project' identities which seek a transformation of society or a redefinition of their status within it.<sup>33</sup> The ways in which these operas redefined Breton identity by renegotiating the region's cultural status and moderating its relationship with the cultural life of the capital will constitute a recurring theme in the case studies. Similarly, the shifts in French musical identity, which occurred concurrently, must be subjected to a similar evaluation. The emergent 'project' identity for French music as it sought to shed German (especially Wagnerian) and Italian influences through a determined rediscovery of its own regional musical

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in *La Bretagne à l'Opéra*, Exhibition Catalogue of the Musée Départemental Breton, (Quimper: 1994), p. 29.

[ '... to create an autonomous Breton music movement and to regroup those Breton musicians who constitute a national (Breton) body of work.' ]

<sup>33</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 8.



heritage during the nineteenth century thus provides an additional context for the examination of burgeoning regionalism.

The relationship between fluid regional and central cultural identities and the concomitant extent to which the operas present Brittany as 'Elsewhere' and its inhabitants as 'Other' is also a significant consideration. As Heather Williams suggests, regionalist works were 'written to Paris' with the tastes of the capital in mind.<sup>34</sup> They were, moreover, promoted by notables or intellectuals whose professional lives were conducted there and were, therefore, potential vehicles for representing the province as an exotic, yet paradoxically familiar outpost of the centralized nation. As Ralph Locke's definition of the functions of musical exoticism notes, they could thus evoke for both creators and consumers alike, a 'place (people and social milieu) [...] perceived as different from home' and yet 'resembling home in certain ways.'<sup>35</sup>

Locke, moreover, referring to Albéniz, recognizes a distinct musical process ('auto-exoticizing') in which a composer consciously renders himself and his native land exotic;<sup>36</sup> the extent to which this deliberate heightening of difference and binary tensions for aesthetic appeal is detectable in the works of composers with an authentic or, conversely, an adopted Breton cultural patrimony will be a significant point of reference. However, Edward Said, reflecting on the Orientalist discourse which characterizes the ways in which the West has conjured its Eastern 'other' and

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<sup>34</sup> Heather Williams, 'Writing to Paris: Poets, Nobles and Savages in Nineteenth-Century Brittany', *French Studies*, 57 (2003), pp. 475–490.

<sup>35</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 47.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

which is equally apposite when applied to responses to the adjacent fringes of the 'civilized centre' of the homeland, also recognizes that the depiction of the exotic is frequently the measure of more complex hegemonic responses to a 'cultural contestant':

In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.<sup>37</sup>

Since attempts to render the province as exotic may be expected to emerge from the manner in which the Breton landscape and the people of the province are evoked musically and in the various libretti, evidence of the promotion or idealization of stereotypical landscapes and temperaments in such a way as to foster central conceptions of the region as a seductive, alien and untamed liminal zone which reinforced the linear, progressive cultural superiority of the capital will therefore equally allow for a nuanced investigation of regionalist tendencies.

The historian Eric Hobsbawm has, in addition, noted that in the thirty or forty years before the First World War — the period of profound social change in which most of the operas in this study were composed or conceived — there was a marked drive to reinvent traditions in order to establish social cohesion and define the public life of the citizen.<sup>38</sup> Whether the operas in the study contributed to this process of establishing a new sense of national, shared past by engaging with particular regional symbolisms will equally form part of the theoretical frameworks which underpin these studies. However, alongside this overarching consideration of national identity, the specific social changes reflected in these works, and the possible ways in which

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<sup>37</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: inventing traditions', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1-14.

they were implicated in interventionist social critiques relating to both region and capital, will be evaluated.

The axial argument which underpins these debates nevertheless remains a constant: it is that the *couleur locale* on which the four case studies (and the framing works) depended transmitted more than mere spectacle; it was implicated in complex and shifting expressions of national, regional and individual selfhood and belonging.

### **Regionalism and the Literary Sources of the Libretti**

In acknowledging the fact that community identity can be forged only when levels of social communication are extended via the printed word, Benedict Anderson has identified the establishment of print capitalism as a vital factor in the growth of nationalism:

These fellow readers to whom they (those belonging to a particular language field) were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.

He further links the genesis of print capitalism with a crucial shared perception of common history:

Print capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that knowledge of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of nation.<sup>39</sup>

Ethnic nationalism flourished in equal measure as a result of the dissemination of regional characteristics through print history. The nineteenth-century texts that embodied the tripartite regionalist response — the recording of oral testimonies,

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<sup>39</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 44.

cultural re-evaluation and regional promotion — were thus crucial to the establishment of ethnic identity since their existence defined the community which now lay exposed to the imagination of their readership. The unique relationship between the printed word and the emerging nation is, for Anderson, articulated by that exercise of imagination, for a nation must always be considered as ‘*imagined*’ because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.<sup>40</sup>

Amongst the nineteenth-century writings about Brittany, which initiated the insertion of regional consciousness into the cultural life of both province and centrally-conceived nation, can be identified works of importance for both the growth of ethnic nationalism and for the provision of regional signifiers within French opera. The detailed genesis of each opera in this study will be traced in the relevant chapter; it is, however, worth noting that in the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, a significant number of the libretti for ‘Breton’ operas can be traced directly back, either wholly or partially, to the works of Émile Souvestre (1806–1854) or Hersart de la Villemarqué (1815–1895). The works of Anatole Le Braz (1859–1926) who was, in turn, inspired by the rich folkloric heritage relayed and preserved in the works of the first generation of Breton revivalists, also furnished significant material for librettists.

Souvestre’s *Les Derniers Bretons* (*The Last Bretons*), as its title suggests, sets out to record the social customs, religious observances and artistic creativity of the four

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

countries forming Basse Bretagne (Lower Brittany). It was closely followed by *Le Foyer breton* (*The Breton Hearth*), a collection of stories relating to the same four regions and conceived by the author as 'Les Mille et Une Nuits de la Bretagne'.<sup>41</sup> The relationship which Souvestre eagerly attempts to establish between *Le Foyer breton* and the *Arabian Nights*, however, unwittingly draws attention to the limitations of his work both in terms of serious anthropological record and cultural re-evaluation. Those elements of fantasy and romance which are present in the Persian tales are also detectable in Souvestre's writing and the subtitle suggests that the author is unconsciously providing narratives which convey the familiar, yet exotic 'other' for the benefit of Parisian readership. The Breton legends and stories which appear in *Le Foyer breton*, and whose authenticity is corroborated by their appearance elsewhere in other regionalist writings, are freely embellished and indeed are subject to discernable borrowings from other works. Souvestre himself, in a postscript to the story 'Perronik l'idiot', draws attention to the similarity between this Breton tale and the story of Sir Percival in the Arthurian legends.<sup>42</sup> The composers and librettists who similarly manipulated Breton material in order to appeal to entrepreneurs, publishers or public followed in this tradition. It was, however, a tradition for which the best possible precedent could be claimed. As Souvestre was swift to point out, such stories arose from oral tradition and therefore any storyteller who augmented original material merely acted as his predecessors had done since time immemorial:

Le fond et les principaux détails nous étaient seuls fournis, la forme fréquemment modifiée, ne pouvait être reproduite que par approximation. Il fallait enfin nous résigner à conter nous-même d'après les conteurs.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> ['The Thousand and One Nights of Brittany']

<sup>42</sup> Émile Souvestre (1844) *Le Foyer breton* (Rennes: Terre de Brume, 2000), p. 254.

<sup>43</sup> ['The core of the story and the main details were all that we had to go on, the outline had often been altered and could only be approximately reproduced. We had to be content with relaying the story in the same way that the story tellers of old had done.']

Yet Souvestre, for all his criticism of the early travelogues which misrepresented Brittany, nevertheless relied on those quaint and whimsical stories and customs which had the capacity to entertain a Parisian public and frequently resorted to unrestrained hyperbole:

Tout, dans cette contrée, exhale je ne sais quelle enchanteresse et paisible fertilité. Il semble que, couvertes d'églises, de croix, de chapelles, elle soit fécondée par la présence de tant d'objets sacrés.<sup>44</sup>

*Le Foyer breton* was, moreover, published in the capital. It was published in French and in spite of the infusion of Breton place names for artistic verisimilitude, it was thus complicit in the post-revolutionary politicization of language which had resulted in the promotion of centralized, uniform French at the expense of the regional language and dialects.

Hersart de la Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz*, which first appeared in 1839 and which contained some material common to *Le Foyer breton*, nevertheless made a regionalist statement which constituted a more significant challenge to centralized cultural hegemony.<sup>45</sup> This original collection of fifty-three Breton songs, which the author had apparently researched and gathered in the surroundings of his home in Quimperlé,<sup>46</sup> was published in a version which accorded equal importance to the

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Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> ['Everything in this land wafts an indefinable enchantment and peaceful fertility. It seems that, filled with churches, crosses, chapels, it has been enriched by the presence of so many sacred objects.'] Souvestre (1997), p. 43

<sup>45</sup> Hersart de la Villemarqué, *Barsaz Breiz: Chants populaires de la Bretagne* (Paris: Delloye, 1839). The most accurate translation of the title is 'Bardic Poetry'.

<sup>46</sup> The Manor of Plessix, Nizon, about fifteen kilometres from his birthplace in Quimperlé was a family property and La Villemarqué was educated at Sainte Anne d'Auray. He later (1850) acquired the Manor of Keransquer near Quimperlé. All these sites may have contributed to the material contained in various versions of the *Barsaz Breiz*.

ethnic language and to French: the original Breton version of each ballad or folktale appeared on the left-hand side of the page whilst the translation appeared on the right.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the musical, unharmonised settings of the ballads appeared at the end of the book in an appended collection of scores.<sup>48</sup>

The significance of the *Barsaz Breiz*, both for the establishment of ethnic identity and for the assimilation of specific regional cultural markers within the arts cannot be overestimated. Maryon McDonald, in her study of Breton culture, has noted the importance of the Breton language in the definition of the province as both minority and 'other' in opposition to the centralized nation:

When the map of majority and minority identities was drawn up, not all parts of any one nation gained 'popular tradition', 'folklore', or, in later terminology, a 'culture'. A complex combination of historical, symbolic factors has led to a map of France in which areas such as Brittany have leapt forth, while other areas have remained as zones of conceptual silence. The Breton language has been an important factor in making Brittany a prime candidate for the map of traditions, folklore, or culture.<sup>49</sup>

The intimate relationship between racial identity and language was not merely exploited in the *Barsaz Breiz*, for the typographical layout itself gave explicit and visible proof of the 'otherness' which the region represented to the linguistic norms of central hegemony. Whilst none of the operas considered here make extended or consistent use of the Breton language, their libretti refer to precise place names; the religious Pardons of Ploërmel and Foëlgoat, which feature in Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* and Lazzari's *La Lépreuse* respectively, are examples of the projection of linguistic

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<sup>47</sup> The collection comprised five religious poems, sixteen love poems and thirty-two historical poems.

<sup>48</sup> La Villemarqué indicated that these brief 'scores' were the result of his own research and collected 'from the mouths of Breton peasants'. He attributes the final notation to M. Jules Schaeffer (a fellow Breton) of the Académie royale de la musique.

Préface to *Barsaz Breiz* (1839) in La Villemarqué (2003), p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Maryon McDonald, *'We are not French!': Language, culture and identity in Brittany* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 97–121.

difference. Moreover, such references within libretti frequently reinforce the sense of a kingdom apart; the legendary Breton realms of Ys, Armor and Arvor are all cited.<sup>50</sup> The intellectual excitement fostered by the dual-language edition of the *Barsaz Breiz* was maintained by the appearance of subsequent editions which gave the French text prominence. La Villemarqué, therefore, in retrieving, delineating, or even, as his detractors later alleged, reconstructing the past,<sup>51</sup> ensured contemporary recognition of the region as a separate entity and yet provided for its cultural continuity within the overarching nation.

The complex mechanisms which permit the concept of a nation to enter the collective consciousness are not constructed merely from recognition of geographical boundaries, common racial inheritance or the possession of unique language. They also require the perception of a shared history which at the birth of a nation may involve the judicious recovery of forgotten memories. Thus as the unified French nation came into being, Michelet, author of the definitive history of the Revolution wrote:

J'ai donné à beaucoup de morts trop oubliés l'assistance dont moi-même j'aurai besoin. Je les ai exhumé pour une seconde vie ... Ils vivent maintenant avec nous qui nous sentons leurs parents, leurs amis. Ainsi se fait une famille, une cité commune entre les vivants et les morts.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> The kingdoms are named in Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys*, in Lazzari's *Armor* and in Ropartz's *Le Pays* in which the shipwrecked boat is named the 'Star of Arvor'.

<sup>51</sup> The authenticity of the *Barsaz Breiz* was first challenged in 1867 at the time of its third reprint; La Villemarqué fuelled the polemic by justifying his 'retouching' of the folk material which he had collected. Whilst he was castigated at the time by the other notable Breton author, F. M. Luzel, and whilst the controversy persisted long after his death, the discovery of his original notebooks in 1964 by the ethnologist Donatien Laurent restored the reputation of the work. See Donatien Laurent, 'La Villemarqué et le *Barsaz Breiz*; Naissance de la littérature orale', *Ar Men*, 18, pp. 30–49.

<sup>52</sup> ['For many of the long forgotten dead I have performed a service which I will also need one day. I have resurrected them for a second life. Now they live with us who perceive ourselves to be their relatives and friends. Thus a family is constructed, a common city for both the living and the dead.'] Jules Michelet, *Œuvres Complètes*, XX1, p. 268, in the preface to volume 2 of the incomplete *Histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Cited in Anderson (1983), p. 198.



Retrieved history and its transmission through opera libretti are thus potentially significant elements in the works of those composers and librettists who were Breton by birth and who rehearsed and affirmed their cultural identity through narratives and music. The likelihood exists that any appeal to collective memory and shared history based on ethnicity will promote, whether overtly or covertly, an agenda of 'hard' regionalism, the imprint of resistance and the imperative to transcend the deployment of simple 'local colour' in favour of addressing complex cultural and psychological intersections.

However, the mechanism of historical retrieval that became Michelet's personal mission during the formation of the central nation was directly paralleled by La Villemarqué's determined pursuit of Breton folklore. Moreover, since the rediscovery of the past could be manipulated to serve the political needs of the present, the *Barsaz Breiz* was a powerful vehicle for the transmission of cultural identity; indeed, it exceeded the boundaries of folklore and entered the realms of politicized art. Operas that depended on this folkloric source for their libretto thus carry the implicit potential to transmit a subliminal yet distinctly 'hard' regional message alongside their seemingly anodyne legendary narratives. The eleventh chapter of the *Barsaz Breiz*, for example, contains fragments from the epic tale of Morvan or Lez-Breiz, the heroic Breton leader who, assailed by the King of the Franks, not only confronted the enemy, but willingly sought death in a defiant assertion of separatist regional identity.

Although Lez-Breiz appears to be the Breton equivalent of 'Arthur chez les anciens Bretons' (King Arthur of the Ancient Britons)<sup>53</sup>, his conflict is portrayed as particularly bloody and the designation of the aggressor is significant:

Éveille-toi, mon écuyer, et te lève ; et va me fourbir mon épée ;  
Mon casque, ma lance et mon bouclier ; que je les rougisse dans le sang  
des Franks.<sup>54</sup>

La Villemarqué was explicit about the racial identity of the oppressor whom he clearly defined as 'Gaulois, c'est à dire des Franks' (Gallic and thus Frankish). The rest of France, the majority intent on subsuming the peripheral minority of Brittany, is presented, therefore, as a menacing 'other' emanating from a race in which Gallic and Germanic identities are fused. The resonance of this concept was extensive. The cultural and political identity of the region was, by virtue of folklore and reclaimed history, projected as not merely the polar opposite of the dominant central culture, but also as racially untainted by a traditional enemy.

The binary opposition between centre and region which the *Barsaz Breiz* established was crucial to the identity of French music itself. French opera had always been, as Hervé Lacombe notes, subject to invasion and cross-fertilization from repertoires which originated beyond its borders:

The incursion by the German repertory and spirit into French lyric theatre was launched in three waves, successively bearing the operas of Mozart, of Weber, then of Wagner. [...] Although French opera was in need of it, such German influence became overwhelming in the final decades of the nineteenth century, and some French musicians fought to reassert essentially French values and 'break away from Germany'

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<sup>53</sup> La Villemarqué draws this analogy because Lez-Breiz, after death, is said to sleep, awaiting the hour of his country's greatest need, before rising again in its defence.

<sup>54</sup> ['Waken, squire and rise; go, bring me my sword;  
My helmet, lance and shield; so that I may stain them red with Frankish blood.']  
La Villemarqué (2003), p. 145.

(‘s’*évader d’Allemagne*’) — as Debussy put it, no longer to compose after Wagner, but post-Wagner.<sup>55</sup>

As it attempted to break free from Germanic influences generally, and the domination of Wagner in particular, French legends and folksongs offered musicians and librettists intent on asserting a uniquely French, musical ‘resistance’ identity a rich source of basic material for exploitation; the separatist political subtext of the *Barsaz Breiz* represented, moreover, an ideal vehicle for the exploration of modes of resistance and for the formation of a ‘project’, musical identity which looked towards a new future. Lalo, when composing *Le Roi d’Ys*, openly acknowledged the exchange of Wagnerian musical ideals for those which could be promoted by a concise folk legend drawn from the works of La Villemarqué and Souvestre.

Indeed, the existence of the Breton language, given prominence in the first edition of the *Barsaz Breiz*, affirmed philological links with lands beyond the borders of the Hexagon since La Villemarqué had assiduously researched the folklore and linguistic heritage of Ireland, Scotland and Wales in a quest to raise the cultural status of Brittany. In order to counter Southern claims to a superior cultural heritage based on the re-evaluation of troubadour poetry, La Villemarqué pursued the idea of the comparable existence of a Breton bard whose lays, once discovered, would potentially rival their Provencal counterparts.<sup>56</sup> Having failed to prove conclusively

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<sup>55</sup> Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Edward Schneider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 300.

<sup>56</sup> He did, in fact, believe that he had identified a bard — Guinclan or Gwenc’hlan — in 1835. It was rumoured that a document in the library of the Abbey at Landévennec (Finistère) would prove his existence. The document was never located and the writer, Prosper Mérimée, who was at that time the Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Finistère, was, as a result, in dispute with La Villemarqué.

that such a bard had ever existed on French soil, the author then transferred his quest to those Celtic kingdoms beyond the Channel.<sup>57</sup>

This recognition of Breton racial affinities with ethnic minorities beyond France's borders enabled not merely an imagined separation of Brittany from the centrally-unified nation, but also laid claim to a unique racial identity in which Breton and Celtic elements were perceived as synonymous. Although philological enquiry into the Breton language had existed prior to the publication of the *Barsaz Breiz*, the work is to be considered as pivotal in the construction and modification of regional identity and indeed has, from the publication of the first dual-language version in 1839 onwards, been endowed with iconic status. Nineteenth-century operas which post-dated it and absorbed its influences, whether explicitly or implicitly, thus tapped into a potent symbolic source.

However, Breton ethnic identity based on assumed Celtic cultural inheritance was, and remains, ambiguous. Diversity of culture and language has always existed within the province, so that any claim to a unique racial inheritance was at best tenuous and even arbitrary. Since Julius Caesar had originally employed the term *celtae* to designate one of the tribes of Gaul, the term 'Celt' was long understood to be synonymous with 'Gaul' and thus 'Celtic' was widely interpreted as 'French'. Brittany could thus assert a claim to Celtic identity only through its identification with the nation as a whole. Fluid perceptions of what constituted Celtic cultural inheritance persisted throughout the nineteenth century until the *Barsaz Breiz* itself promoted a Breton separatist ideology based on the appropriation of Celtic

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<sup>57</sup> La Villemarqué visited Wales in September 1838 and returned to France the following year in February.

ethnicity.<sup>58</sup> In exploiting this ambivalence, artists of all kinds armed themselves with particular advantages.

## Methodology of the Study

An equivocal cultural identity which marked Brittany as separate and yet paradoxically one with the unified nation offered clear attractions for composers and librettists who were prepared to exploit the scenic attractions, folklore and symbolic potential of the region. Whilst exploiting this rich source of ethnic appeal, they could, nonetheless, direct the finished product towards the capital and central hegemony. For the notables and bourgeoisie who constituted the audiences, these works were likely to have had an augmented appeal which functioned on one level in much the same way as those operas which drew on oriental references — they could provide the vision of a distant ‘other’ in binary opposition to the known and the mundane; nevertheless, any potential psychological threat contained in this seductive, disordered world beyond the boundaries of normality could be mitigated by the fact that this ‘other’ was, in fact, familiar. In addition, ambivalent perceptions of Celtic ethnicity offered a powerful tool for the transmission of responses to national as well as to a specific regional identity. The extent to which central hegemony was strengthened by an indulgent nod in the direction of the untamed Celtic land which ultimately remained its enthralled subject will thus be a major source of enquiry in the study of the four Breton operas which are considered here.

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<sup>58</sup> La Villemarqué’s perception of the terms ‘Celt’ and ‘Gaul’ fluctuated. At the time of the publication of the first edition of the *Barsaz Breiz*, he acknowledged the Celt as the inheritor of Gallic resistance against invasion. However, by 1842 he had identified Brittany as the locus of Celtic minority resistance against German invasion and infiltration. See Guiomar (1997), pp. 3479–3510.

The nature of the Breton narratives which inspired composers and librettists is, therefore, central to the interrogation of the works in the study. The extent to which the appeal of 'regional' opera plots was sustained by the universality of the themes of their narratives, or to which it was indebted to the inclusion of specific Breton folk material, merits attention. Such stories inevitably aired psychological and social concerns which had occupied the bourgeoisie since time immemorial. Eugen Weber has noted the realities which underpinned the myths and folk tales which were prevalent in French rural communities prior to the nineteenth century and whose themes are reflected in the operas in this study:

Like so much of popular culture, popular ideology appears mimetic. If it is not, then it reflects a coincidence of values which can be attributed to the fact that, *au fond*, the fundamental conditions of life are the same for all: a high death rate, a high incidence of illnesses and accidents, and fairly narrow limits to lived experience, compensated by frequent recourse to the supernatural. The world is finite, in space as in possibilities, and it is contingent, with fortune or misfortune playing a crucial role.<sup>59</sup>

Weber, however, further acknowledges the changing response to folk lore at the *fin de siècle* and indicates that the motors of social change, such as improved hygiene and diet, increased agricultural productivity and better infrastructures, brought about a fall in the mortality rate, increased health and familial stability and the decline of the relevance of folklore: 'Changing material conditions meant that the realistic substance of *märchen* (fairy stories) no longer matched experience.'<sup>60</sup>

The relegation of the 'substance' of Breton folk tales from lived experience to the realms of diverting fiction and the ways in which this process is implicated in the

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<sup>59</sup> Weber (1991), p. 87.

<sup>60</sup> Weber (1991), p. 89.

reception of operas with Breton markers, both in Paris and in Brittany itself, is likely to inform the enquiry of the four case studies which are considered here. It is, moreover, evident that the enthusiasm for regionally-defined opera libretti enabled the rising bourgeoisie to covertly examine a rural past, which was not chronologically, in fact, so very distant. The operas potentially allowed for a self-congratulatory review of the distance which socially-mobile elites had travelled from their provincial roots. The nature of the overt and covert exploration of the shared past, whether actual or expediently constructed, which Anderson deemed so vital to the 'imagined community', will thus form a significant element in the evaluation of the case studies.<sup>61</sup>

The nineteenth century was, moreover, an era of rapid demographic change; social mobility and migration towards the cities not only granted access to the opera to 'Up and coming politicians, retired merchants, *la petite juiverie* in force, artists, journalists, men of the world, musicians, friends of the management, clients, *commanditaires* and protégés of the government' but also constrained Breton composers and librettists, like the intellectuals and writers whose works had initially promoted the Breton cultural renaissance, to work 'in exile' either in the capital itself or in similarly large urban centres.<sup>62</sup> Even when the symbolism and themes deployed in an opera relate specifically to Brittany, therefore, the complex and delicate balance between regional and central cultural contexts and the extent to which the works demonstrate evidence of the narrative or musical 'imaginative colonization' of the province by central culture will be fundamental to this enquiry.

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<sup>61</sup> Anderson (1983), p. 44.

<sup>62</sup> The social groups of opera-goers were identified in 1889 by Gaston Jollivet in 'Les Coulisses de l'Opéra', *La Vie Parisienne* (13 April 1889). Quoted in Spies (1998), p. 75.

Whilst the ways in which the Breton landscape is musically or scenically evoked in the course of the operas will inevitably constitute a vital component of this evaluation, the precise details of history or geography are, nevertheless, likely to be less relevant than their role in allowing for the 'imagined community' to be conjured. All of the operas in the study, even those works which deal with actual historical events, which are accurately sited or which attempt faithfully to reproduce traditional dress, rely on imagined space constructed and projected so as to serve the psychological, social and cultural needs of their creators. Paradoxically, even the authenticity of those collections of folklore which provided the motor for regional re-evaluation in Brittany, was later challenged,<sup>64</sup> thus it will be the extent to which 'the past, whether real or imagined, [is placed] at the service of the present' and to which the myths and stories which are musically transmitted are valuable because 'we are led by them to lead richer or poorer lives' that will be significant.<sup>65</sup> As the Breton historian and public intellectual Ernest Renan acknowledged:

L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation, et c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger. [...] Or l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses.<sup>66</sup>

Neither the historical nor the folkloric errors which were transmitted in the works on which the operas were based and which were subsequently compounded by their translation to the lyrical stage were ultimately important. The overlapping and

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<sup>64</sup> See p. 24, footnote 46.

<sup>65</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p. 92.

<sup>66</sup> ['The act of forgetting, and I would even say historical error, are an essential factor in the creation of a nation and thus the progress of historical study is often a danger for the nation. [...] So the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common and that they have forgotten many things.']

Renan, *Conférence à la Sorbonne* (1882).



sometimes conflicting imaginary spaces which they mapped and the implicit invitation which they contained to the exercise of collective memory based on judicious forgetting were, however, vital for the cultural identity of the region, for the hegemonic conception of the nation as a whole and for the future identity of French music. The nexus of these relationships will be the foundation of this study.

### **The Frame, 1: *Le Pardon de Ploërmel***

Nous avançons toujours, et par tous les sentiers  
Ce n'étaient que chapeaux, coiffes et tabliers,  
Allant vers le pardon ; sur la bruyère verte,  
Des vapeurs du matin encore toute couverte,  
Le soleil par moments dardait ses grands rayons;  
Et mon âme volait en exaltations.<sup>67</sup>

Whilst this study examines four 'core' operas which demonstrate the extent to which *couleur locale* could be deployed or manipulated to serve particular cultural or psychological goals, two operas will be briefly considered at the beginning and at the end of the enquiry as a frame for the main analysis. A useful starting point, then, for any examination of operas set in Brittany is provided by Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* or *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*. Not only was it the first major, and enduringly-successful 'Breton' opera, but the date of its première at the Opéra-Comique in 1859 provides an initial chronological demarcation; more importantly, as the only opera in the study whose composer had no apparent connection with Brittany and which

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<sup>67</sup> [We carried on steadily, and along all the paths  
All that could be seen were hats and coiffes and aprons,  
Going to the pardon; the green broom  
Was still covered by the morning mists,  
The sun, from time to time, beat down with huge beams;  
And my soul soared with exaltation.]

Auguste Brizeux, 'Le Chemin du Pardon', *Marie* (Paris: Paul Masagna, 1840), pp. 82–6.

nevertheless arguably overtly exploits local colour for the sake of spectacle, it represents an obvious foil to the later operas and a means by which the progress of the significant inclusion of Breton regional markers can be determined.<sup>68</sup>

For Meyerbeer, at the height of his fame as a composer of grand opera, *Le Pardon* was his first and only uniquely French *opéra comique*.<sup>69</sup> Its significance for the composer is moreover demonstrated by the fact that Meyerbeer was prepared to jettison his long association with the librettist Eugène Scribe in order to work with a pre-existing outline libretto produced by the younger duo of Jules Barbier and Michel Carré. The first mention in Meyerbeer's diaries of the existence of the libretto came on 27 May 1854: 'Barbier showed me his plan for a one-act comic opera, *Le Chercheur des trésors*'; thereafter, brief references throughout the following months of the year testify to his interest in the project until, in October of that year, he began openly to refer to 'my new opera, *Le Chercheur des trésors*' (*The Treasure Seeker*).<sup>70</sup>

Whilst the original title of the work, as it appears in the early diary entries, ostensibly provides a clue to the literary source of the libretto, controversy surrounding the precise identity of that source has always existed. Although most commentators cite the same two short novellas, produced by the Breton writer Émile Souvestre and serialised in the *Revue des deux mondes* during 1850, as the likely origins of the plot, none fully acknowledge the extent to which the libretto derived from multiple sources or to which the contributors to that libretto pillaged a number of works that were

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<sup>68</sup> My intention here is to consider the opera in the light of its regional significance. A detailed evaluation of the work occurs in Robert Letellier, *The Operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), pp. 226–45.

<sup>69</sup> His earlier comic opera, *L'Étoile du Nord* (1854) was a translation of *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*, originally produced for the German stage in 1844.

<sup>70</sup> *The Diaries of Giacomo Meyerbeer: Volume. 3, The Years of Celebrity, 1850–1856*, trans. and ed. by Robert Ignatius Letellier (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), p. 289.

published in Paris in the period immediately preceding Meyerbeer's initial interest in Breton narratives.<sup>71</sup>

The first of the narratives which has been widely assumed to be the main source of the libretto is 'La Chasse aux trésors' ('The Treasure Hunt'). The title is certainly reflected in the title of the outline libretto produced by Barbier and Carré; however, whilst the narrative contains elements of the eventual plot of *Le Pardon*, it does not account for many significant elements which characterize the dramatic action. During the course of the novella narrative, two rural itinerants, Claude, the pot-mender, and Jean-Marie, the mole-catcher, pursue an elusive, ill-fated treasure. However, the narrative is nonetheless a realistic appraisal of peasant greed and the pursuit of unattainable goals rather than a diverting fantasy. In order to avoid the curse which attaches to the 'dead man's treasure', and which guarantees imminent death to the first person to touch the gold, the treasure seekers conspire to use Jean-Marie's idiot sister to retrieve the desired hoard. The abuse of the innocent, dumb girl — a female protagonist whose cretinous existence is worlds apart from Dinorah's benign madness in the opera — results in a rock fall which kills her; moreover, the details of her pitiful death in the mole-catcher's hovel are minutely described, so that the narrative becomes a stern, realistic moral parable rather than a fairy tale. In addition, whilst the author, Souvestre, was Breton, the narrative is set outside the province; the action takes place in the Loire valley between Mamers and Le Mans.

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<sup>71</sup> Letellier (2006), p. 228, and Jean Mongrédien, in *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* (1994), p. 44, cite 'La Chasse aux trésors'. In Letellier's account of the second source, however, an inaccurate title 'Le Kacouss de l'amour' ['The Kacouss of Love'] appears; this is a significant error because it robs the title of its Breton significance. The actual title, 'Le Kacouss de l'Armor', refers to the ancient name for Brittany — Armor. Heinz and Gudrun Becker, the editors of Meyerbeer's letters and diaries, however, declare the libretto source to be a Provencal legend. *Giuseppe Meyerbeer: A Life in Letters*, trans. Mark Violette (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1983), p. 161.

In the second of the putative sources, 'Le Kacouss de l'Armor', the female protagonist bears the name 'Dinorah', the name of the opera heroine and the alternative title of Meyerbeer's opera. Dinorah, as she appears in the novella, is a model of innocent piety, having been blessed at her baptism by the appearance of the Virgin Mary; she is desired by Beuzec, a wild youth who, as a child, was rescued from a shipwreck by the local outcast or Kacouss. Subsequently, Beuzec emerges as a thief, a murderer, an arsonist and an attempted rapist. Dinorah emerges from his clutches unscathed and witnesses his journey to the scaffold from the sanitised distance of a religious procession.

This source, then, presented Meyerbeer and his librettists with a heroine who conveniently reinforced the gender-role stereotype of the 'angel of the hearth'. In addition, the Dinorah of the novella is notable for her ability to commune with nature; she was thus a potential protagonist who reinforced Romantic values; more importantly, the evidence of her accord with the environment is transmitted through song:

Arrivé au sommet, elle regarda autour d'elle, leva la main comme si elle eut appelé aux quatre coins du ciel et se mit à répéter je ne sais quel chant sans paroles et sans rythme. [...] Je voyais la jeune fille, dont la silhouette se découpait sur l'azur du ciel, semer le grain en chantant à demi-voix, tandis que les bouvreuils, les roitelets et les rouges-gorges, voletant alentour, l'enveloppaient dans leurs évolutions aériennes.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> ['At the top, she looked around, lifted her hands if beckoning to the four corners of the sky and began to sing a strange song without words or rhythm. [...] I saw the young girl, her silhouette etched against the blue of the sky, singing in a low voice as bullfinches, goldcrests and robins performed aerial acrobatics around her.']

Emile Souvestre, 'Le Kacouss de l'Armor', *Revue des deux mondes*, 7 (1850), p. 86.

The transfer of Dinorah from novella to opera stage thus offered the attractive possibility of the inclusion of diegetic song; indeed, the evocation of a pastoral idyll and the valorisation of the natural world, evident in Dinorah's ability to charm the animal kingdom in the story, are echoed by the Dinorah of the opera who, whilst in a state of madness, anthropomorphizes her lost goat, Belah, and serenades it with a lullaby.

In the novella, it is, nonetheless, the male protagonist, Beuzec, whose thwarted passions result in actions which suggest criminal insanity; Dinorah, however, is constructed as 'other' only in the sense that she is designated as *la petite sainte*. Her actions are always rational, so that the novella does not account for the benign madness which characterizes the Dinorah of the opera.

Yet Souvestre's story of the Kacouss remains a strong contender for the libretto source since the narrative outlines Breton piety in terms of a complex set of religious responses which, whilst superficially Christian, are nevertheless overlaid by superstition, magic and concomitant patterns of social inclusion and exclusion. Souvestre asserts that '[...] en Bretagne, [...] la légende chrétienne s'est partout substituée à la mythologie gauloise où la Vierge et les saints ont remplacé les fées de l'Armor';<sup>73</sup> the male and female protagonists, cast in a binary opposition of good and evil, defined in Christian terms in the narrative by the mutual attraction of the 'devil's son' for the 'Virgin's godchild', seem, nevertheless, to be drawn directly from fairy tales. This amalgam of folklore and Christian hagiography is equally resonant within Meyerbeer's opera.

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<sup>73</sup> ['Throughout Brittany, Christian doctrine is substituted by Gaulish mythology in which the Virgin and the saints have replaced the fairies of Armor.']  
Ibid., p. 85.

That multiple Breton sources were plundered in the construction of the libretto is apparent from the inclusion of a fragment from a further story from Souvestre's *Le Foyer breton* in the 'Chanson de Corentin' from Act 2, scene 5. In this number, Corentin, the bagpiper, chants the days of the week as a charm against evil whilst Hoël, the hero, descends into the cursed valley;<sup>74</sup> the full resonance of the incantation can, however, only be retrieved by reference to Souvestre's story 'Les korils de Plaudren' in which the plot hinges on the discovery of the way to obtain power over the korrigans (Breton goblins) and gain access to their riches. This feat is achieved by completing their refrain of 'Lundi, mardi, mercredi/Jeudi, vendredi, samedi' (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday/Thursday, Friday, Saturday) with the words 'Avec le dimanche aussi' (And Sunday as well). That the 'spell' in the opera uses the same formula and occurs spontaneously and without explanation is a testimony to the immense popularity of the works written by Bretons with Parisian tastes and fashions in mind; Meyerbeer was evidently able to presume on his audience's familiarity with Souvestre's tales.

Moreover Meyerbeer's willingness and ability to plunder those sources in order to obtain the distilled essence of all that the region had come to mean to central hegemony is evident from the final piece of evidence which links the libretto firmly to the works of Souvestre. The source which gave rise to the narrative elements of Dinorah's elusive goat and the sorcery which causes the loss of Dinorah's fortune, the treasure hunt, the separation of the lovers and Dinorah's resulting madness in the opera, has long been debated. Letellier endorses J. K. Law's attribution of these

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<sup>74</sup> 'Les korils de Plaudren' in Souvestre (2000), pp. 223–234.

elements to the novels of Laurence Sterne;<sup>75</sup> however, an additional story by Souvestre from the series published in the *Revue des deux mondes*, 'Le Sorcier', demonstrates that once again a work by a Breton author intent on conjuring the North of France as the mysterious, seductive 'other' for the benefit of central hegemony can be identified as the probable source for these elements. Ironically, the novella is set in Normandy; however, the narrative action concerns the havoc wrought by a local 'sorcerer' amongst superstitious rural folk. The dénouement of the plot is provided by the tragic death of a young female goatherd who has gone to the sorcerer for advice after losing a goat, but who, the narrative implies, has been seduced or raped by the sorcerer himself and is, as a result, pregnant. Sorcerers are thus presented as dangerous 'others' who use their arcane powers to destabilise Christian marriage; the goat girl commits suicide by drowning when her fiancé is alerted to her plight and her wedding is threatened.<sup>76</sup> Whilst Meyerbeer's Dinorah is chaste, sorcery precipitates her madness — a metaphorical death which severs her from the life that she once knew; moreover the moral precepts of the opera, which relate to the dangers of concealment and the valorisation of truth over riches, are those which are clearly stated in the story when the goat girl is first discovered with the sorcerer:

'Quand on n'a rien à craindre, on n'a rien à cacher,' dit le jeune homme avec une persistance mêlée de dureté; 'une honnête fille ne doit point avoir de secrets.'<sup>77</sup>

Any explanation, then, which attempts to implicate works by Hugo or Sterne as possible influences on Meyerbeer's *Le Pardon*, fails to recognize the wider context of

<sup>75</sup> J. K. Law, 'Meyerbeer's Variations on a Theme by Laurence Sterne: or "Why a goat?"', *The Opera Journal*, 22 (1989), pp. 3–8.

<sup>76</sup> Émile Souvestre, *Les Récits de la Muse Populaire* (Marseille: Lafitte Reprints, 1982), pp. 26–32.

<sup>77</sup> ['When you've got nothing to fear, you've got nothing to hide,' said the young man with a persistence which was mingled with obduracy, 'a good girl shouldn't have any secrets.'] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Souvestre's prolific output for the *Revue des deux mondes*, its narrative continuity<sup>78</sup> and the geographical settings of the serialised stories. Moreover the overwhelming popularity of Souvestre's 'folk' tales and the cultural impetus towards the imaginative colonization of Brittany, even when the ethnic context and *topoi* of the narratives could only be tenuously linked to the province, were ultimately sufficiently imperative to guarantee the success of the opera which was conjured from the literary sources.

The saturation of local colour which characterizes the opera is, moreover, by no means attributable to the original librettists. Meyerbeer, as Barbier complained, persistently interfered with the libretto:

C'est ce qui nous arriva, à Carré et moi, pour *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* dont nous avons fait un tout petit ouvrage, et que Meyerbeer nous a présenté trituré, torturé, allongé.<sup>79</sup>

The extent to which Meyerbeer was directly implicated in this voracious acquisition, and manipulation, of Breton material can, moreover be deduced from the lengthy consultations regarding libretto amendments which he pursued with the actress and dramatist Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer whose most recent success had been an adaptation of George Sand's *La Petite Fadette* (1848), a rural tale which was regionally specific to Sand's home province of Berry. Meyerbeer thus not only selected a fellow German

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<sup>78</sup> The individual stories are multiple narratives; the 'frame' is provided by the author/traveller, a first-person narrator whose encounters give rise to further stories and reflections.

<sup>79</sup> ['That's what happened to us, to Carré and me, with *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* which we had written as a small-scale work and which Meyerbeer returned to us chewed up, distorted and lengthened.']

Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 340.



for the task of lengthening and augmenting the original libretto, but actively invited contributions from a seasoned adaptor of locally-inflected material. Moreover the regular references to Birch-Pfeiffer in Meyerbeer's diary entries for May of 1855 suggest that Barbier's complaints were well grounded; on Saturday 19 May, Meyerbeer notes 'In the afternoon, a long conference with Birch-Pfeiffer about the changes in the *Chercheur*.'<sup>80</sup> Notwithstanding these early changes, however, the iron control exercised by the composer was persistent; the entry for 6 September 1856 reads: 'Went through all the changes I myself have made in the *Chercheur* with the poet Carré.'<sup>81</sup>

Throughout these first revisions, Meyerbeer continued to refer to the new opera in his diary as *Le Chercheur des trésors*; however, the adoption of the final title, *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*, arguably demonstrates yet another intensification of the *couleur locale* which had already been extracted from the works of Souvestre. The title of the opera refers to the Pardon, the Breton religious pilgrimage in honour of the Virgin Mary, and its overture contains a chorus which evokes that procession; nevertheless, only one of Souvestre's tales ('Le Kacouss de l'Armor') briefly mentions an unnamed religious procession and none refer directly to the Pardon by name. Meyerbeer, as a devout Jew who apparently had never visited Brittany, would, in addition, have lacked personal experience of similar events. The possibility therefore exists that another Breton work, known to Meyerbeer or his librettists, was influential in the introduction of this additional religious element. The most likely contender can be found in the output of the Breton poet, Auguste Brizeux (1803–1858), whose popular series of Breton idylls was published as *Marie* and who was contributing regularly to

<sup>80</sup> *The Diaries of Giacomo Meyerbeer: Volume 3, 1850–1856, The Years of Celebrity*, Robert Ignatius Letellier, trans. (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), p. 320.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391

the *Revue des deux mondes* at the same time as Souvestre,<sup>82</sup> more importantly, his work had been set by notable composers such as Massé and Berlioz whose relationship with Meyerbeer has been well documented.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, Brizeux's *Marie* possessed particular attractions for a composer intent on producing an opera which, whilst relying on regional colour, was nevertheless specifically aimed at central hegemonic tastes and cultural concerns. Not only did it contain the partly dialogic poem 'Le Chemin du Pardon' ('The Route to the Pardon') which dramatises the procession as a conversation between a young man and girl combined with a first-person reflection on events by the poet himself, but it also maximized the appeal of the Breton rural idyll by presenting it as the binary opposite of the capital. The gravitational artistic pull of Paris is hailed in the idylls:

[...] Voici le centre  
L'ardent foyer qui lance en tout lieu ses rayons.<sup>84</sup>

However, the exiled poet rejects urban sophistication in favour of the simple piety which characterizes the spiritual life of his native province, whilst nonetheless affirming his status as a Parisian writer:

Je sens qu'il est bien doux de parler du pays.  
J'en dois savoir parler !  
[...] Et dans Paris  
L'histoire de ce jour, tristement je l'écris.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> An extract from *Marie* heads this section.

<sup>83</sup> Berlioz settings of Brizeux's *Marie* are: (1835) 'Le Paysan breton', (1850) 'Le Jeune Pâtre breton', 'Le Chant des bretons', Op 13. nos. 4 and 5.

Later in the century, César Franck provided a musical setting for Brizeux's 'Le Procession' (1888).

<sup>84</sup> ['Behold the centre!

The fiery hearth which sends forth its beams to every corner.']

<sup>85</sup> ['I know that it is sweet to talk of one's homeland.

I should know how sweet it is!

And sadly I write the story of this day

In Paris.']

Auguste Brizeux, 'Paris' and 'Le Chemin du Pardon', *Marie* (Paris: Paul Masagna, 1840), pp. 17–21 and 82–6.

Meyerbeer, then, clearly drew on a range of fashionable, contemporary sources, distilling the cultural essence of Brittany to its utmost concentration whilst maintaining the cultural supremacy of the capital. Nevertheless, in referring to the Pardon, he equally asserted and reinforced the concept of picturesque, simple Breton religiosity which contributed significantly to the narrative colonization of the region.

The original *mise en scène*, no less than the amended libretto, was complicit in establishing Brittany as a locus of the picturesque since Breton traditional costume was adopted for the entire cast. Male protagonists were all required to wear the ‘culotte à canon’<sup>86</sup> and the proportions of these traditional baggy trousers were demonstrably exaggerated in the original costume designs.



1: Lithograph of Sainte Foy as Corentin<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> ['wide-barrelled trousers']

<sup>87</sup> Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Planche 816, C261.

Yet the original costumes not only asserted the ambivalent mix of familiar and exotic which became the hallmark of later Breton operas, they also, by the nature of their stylised forms, hinted at the cultural exclusivity of the region and presented it as a secret idyll whose exotic ‘otherness’ was implicit in its alien dress codes. Moreover, this representation of *couleur locale*, as so much else in Meyerbeer’s Breton opera, was instrumental in establishing and valorising the meaning of Breton traditional dress for later generations and artistic works of all kinds.



2: Anonymous pencil and ink sketch of the costume design for Dinorah<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, D216.OC1.

Yet although the stage directions and *mise en scène* equally promoted the region as possessing unique physical features such as 'une lande déserte s'étendant à perte de vue jusqu'à la mer',<sup>89</sup> Meyerbeer's score stopped short of a full exploitation of the musical resources of the region. No authentic Breton musical themes were incorporated and the opportunity presented by the inclusion of the character of Corentin, the bagpiper, was bypassed.<sup>90</sup> Corentin's *binioù* (bagpipe) number (3) in Act I is partly orchestrally projected since it is marked by a conventional drone bass played by two clarinets, whilst the cor anglais and oboe approximate the bagpipe sound; an authentic cornemuse, however, is not deployed.

The opera differs from later Breton operas in that the regional markers are exploited more for their contribution to overarching spectacle than as vehicles for the covert exploration of contemporary social issues. Established gender-role expectations and social and class hierarchies remain unchallenged. The female protagonist Dinorah conforms to the model of the chaste 'angel of the hearth'; whilst she is, for much of the dramatic action, mentally unbalanced, her insanity is temporary and benign. Moreover, she further fulfils the patriarchal expectations of the Romantic era in that she is precipitated into madness by the loss of a lover; the restoration of her sanity and the restoration of her lost betrothed, Hoël, coincide. Dinorah's first major aria is a cradle-song which arguably projects her dementia as a regression to childhood; however, the lullaby is directed at her pet goat and equally reinforces the maternal

<sup>89</sup> ['A deserted heath stretching as far as the eye could see to the sea'.]

<sup>90</sup> Jean Mongrédien notes that Berlioz, in the *Journal des Débats* (10 April 1859), announced Meyerbeer's dissatisfaction with the 'Pater noster' in the third act (no. 19) and indicated the composer's intention to provide a new prayer based on a Breton theme which had been sent to him from Quimperlé. No further evidence of Meyerbeer's pursuit of this goal appears to exist. See Mongrédien, *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* (1994). However, Quimperlé was the home of La Villemarqué, the author of the *Barsaz Breiz*; it is possible that the writer had suggested one of the folk tunes which he had collected as a possible source.

function for which she is ultimately destined. In addition, the fact that, in her celebrated 'shadow song', she is demonstrably bewitched by her own reflected appearance defines her role as a decorative object and, since her costume is effectively her wedding dress, she asserts the contemporary cultural values of her class and gender.

Similarly, although the libretto plot is rooted in folkloric narrative — it is concerned with the search for the lost treasure which will restore Dinorah's fortune and with the dangerous magic attendant on that quest — it nonetheless subtly reinforced hegemonic perceptions of life in the provinces. Weber, acknowledging that fairytales are revelatory of the social conditions of storytellers and their listeners, further significantly noted:

The other thing the poor dream about is treasure: gold, silver, anything they could lay their hands on, precisely because they could lay their hands on so little or none. [...] In the absence of banks, hiding one's capital or savings was the natural thing to do. Crumbling walls, abandoned cottages or wells, hollow trees or a chance digging could reveal unexpected wealth.<sup>91</sup>

The apparent fantasy of the fairy-tale narrative thus paradoxically concealed yet subliminally asserted the harsh economic realities of provincial life; it subtly reinforced the superiority of central hegemony by allowing it to maintain its sense of identity in relation to its underprivileged, familiar, yet nonetheless exotic other.

*The Pardon de Ploërmel*, then, represents an invaluable prototype 'Breton opera' against which later examples can be usefully measured. Its significance cannot be underestimated because it drew on every possible type of regional marker to

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<sup>91</sup> Weber (1991), p. 82.

achieve a distilled, intensely concentrated essence of local colour and, in so doing, it functioned as a conduit for ideas about the province. Whilst it reflected the popularity of those contemporary Breton literary works that were written in and for Paris, it was equally responsible for amalgamating and disseminating those ideas and for establishing a particular stereotype of the region. Moreover, it was complicit in initiating the process which would ensure that those same literary works which purported to record Breton rural life and folklore would ultimately be deemed as regionally canonical. Such literary works were to become the bedrock from which the libretti of future Breton regional operas would be hewn.

Nevertheless, whilst *Le Pardon* served Meyerbeer's particular commercial and psychological needs to write a second comic opera, it was not produced to achieve a new French musical identity, to motor the cultural renaissance of the region or to specifically comment on or effect social change. Gerhard has noted that local colour in grand opera serves to 'give a coherent form to [...] very large works'<sup>92</sup>; the suggestion that local colour is deployed as a structurally cohesive device is, nonetheless, equally applicable to Meyerbeer's second comic opera in which regional markers clearly facilitate the integration of disparate comic elements. However, Meyerbeer seems to have been dismayed at the notion that the story which underpinned the libretto should be set elsewhere than in Brittany; in a letter to Louis Brandus on 13 December 1857, he provides explicit instructions for a response to the suggestion from Louis Roqueplan, the director of the Opéra-Comique, that any region would suffice as the setting or that he would be 'indifferent to the idea of changing the locale':

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<sup>92</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 160.

[...] both the local color of the libretto and of the music are rooted in this region (Brittany). Therefore, for the sake of consistency, the locale could not be changed. It is a good idea to make him aware of this *now*. I really do not understand what prompted him to ask this question.<sup>93</sup>

His defensive response is a testament to the aesthetic benefits of local colour, but hints, nonetheless, at the seductive appeal of the region that would inspire the composers of future 'Breton' operas to produce equally committed, but artistically and culturally diverse lyrical works.

Moreover, the reception history of *Le Pardon* arguably demonstrates its significance for the Breton operas which were premièred in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. As Robert Letellier records, *Le Pardon* was not merely an immediate success which reflected the stature of its composer in Paris, it was an instant and enduring 'hit' in all of the major opera houses of Europe and America.<sup>94</sup> The vision which it conjured of Brittany as a liminal zone where magic and simple religious piety interacted, where the familiar and the exotic merged and where an existing picturesque landscape could instantly be transmuted into an idyllic dreamscape, was thereby so widely disseminated as to become received knowledge. Whilst the four operas which form the main part of this study served different psychological needs, responded to different cultural challenges and addressed particular social ills, they all nevertheless owed a debt to Meyerbeer's *Pardon* in that they drew on this vision and relied for their libretti sources on the regional folkloric material whose credibility had, in part, been established by their illustrious forerunner.

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<sup>93</sup> Becker and Becker (1989), pp. 161–2.

<sup>94</sup> The reception history is outlined in Letellier (2006), p. 237.



# A Princess, a King and a Saint

## *Le Roi d'Ys*

Opéra-Comique, 1888

Is est morte, vous dis-je ! ... Is la ville éternelle,  
L'Océan a jeté son suaire sur elle ;  
Et la terre tremblait au bruit.  
Is n'était rien de plus qu'un trésor qu'on dérobe,  
Il la prit, je l'ai vu, dans les plis de sa robe,  
Comme un voleur pendant la nuit !

Ils sont restés dans Is; tous y sont à cette heure  
Et battent de leurs fronts les murs de leur demeure,  
Hagards, béants, les yeux éteints.  
Pauvres amours surpris, agapes lamentables !  
Et maintenant la mer sur les lits et les tables  
Donne à ses monstres des festins.<sup>1</sup>

The ground floor of The Musée des beaux arts in Quimper is dominated by a particularly striking canvas. Painted by the Breton artist Évariste-Vital Luminais in 1884, it is entitled *La Fuite du roi Gradlon* (The Flight of King Gradlon) and depicts a highly-charged, dramatic moment from a famous Breton legend in which Gradlon,

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<sup>1</sup> ['Is is no more, I tell you! ... Is, the eternal city,  
The Ocean has cast its shroud around it  
And the earth trembled at the sound.  
It was no more than a jewel to be cast off  
The sea took it, as I saw, into the folds of its robe  
Like a thief in the night!]

They remained in the city; they are all there still  
And their faces beat against the walls of their dwelling place;  
Frantic, gaping, with extinguished eyes.  
Pathetic, interrupted love affairs, pitiful banquets!  
And now, on beds and tables, the sea provides the festivities  
For these monsters.']

Jean le Fustec, 'Is' in J. Guy Ropartz and Louis Tiercelin, eds., *Le Parnasse Breton Contemporain* (Paris and Rennes: Alphonse Le Roy, 1889), pp. 140–1.

King of the mysterious and magical city of Ys, is attempting to escape from his drowning city.<sup>2</sup> The city can just be glimpsed on the left of the extreme horizon of a picture plane dominated by the division between lowering sky and overwhelming crashing waves and surf. From this menacing seascape, two horses gallop frantically forward. One, unbridled and bearing the saint who is the *deus ex machina* of the legend, leaps forward with such urgency that the onlooker is tempted to retreat a step for fear that it will, in the final lung-bursting moment of exhaustion, emerge beyond the canvas itself. The second horse, that of King Gradlon, has swerved aside in terror and the vanishing point of the linear perspective is focused on the hand of its rider which is engaged in throwing a pillion passenger, Gradlon's daughter, into the consuming ocean.



3: Évariste-Vital Luminais, 1884, *La Fuite du roi Gradlon*, oil on canvas, Musée des beaux arts, Quimper.

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<sup>2</sup>Évariste-Vital Luminais (1822–1896).

This theatrical, narrative painting was exhibited at the 1884 Salon of the Académie des Beaux Arts, Paris; it was purchased immediately by the state and installed in Quimper during the same year. Its acceptance by both the cognoscenti of the traditional art world and those responsible for regionally-appropriate acquisitions in the town of Quimper was thus swift and unequivocal.<sup>3</sup> A copy and sketch of the same work are to be found in the city of Rennes (the regional capital) and, indeed, iconographical references to the same legend are common in the Breton region of Cornouaille, of which Quimper is the principal town.<sup>4</sup> The story, of which the painting depicts the tragic dénouement, is an allegory of chaos which endows a pre-existing Celtic pagan deluge myth with a Christianised, hagiographic overlay; it served as the basis for the most commercially successful of the four operas which form the central part of this study and it remains an enduring symbol in Breton regional culture.

The composer of that work, *Le Roi d'Ys*, was Édouard Lalo (1823–1892); as a contemporary of Luminais, the artist of the narrative painting, he almost certainly saw the canvas when it was exhibited in Paris since he is known to have had links with two artists whose works were regularly included in Salon exhibitions.<sup>5</sup> Lalo was, for example, in regular, friendly correspondence with Alfred Roll (1846–1919) whose work was exhibited at the Salon along with Luminais's *La Fuite du roi Gradlon*. It is thus possible that the Luminais painting constituted one of the inspirations that

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<sup>3</sup> The choice of paintings for the Salon was, during the Third Republic, made entirely by a jury elected by artists.

<sup>4</sup> A striking image of the legend can be found in a stained glass window in the church at Kerlaz, Finistère.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Lalo alleged that his father knew Eugène Delacroix well, but although Lalo's cousin, André Wacquez (1814–1880), was a pupil of Delacroix, no confirming evidence has been found. Lalo certainly knew Théodule Ribot, another exhibitor at the 1884 Salon. See Édouard Lalo, *Correspondance*, Joël-Marie Fauquet, ed. (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1989), Letter no.125.

prompted Lalo into reviving and recreating his Breton opera.<sup>6</sup> However, given the success of the painting, which itself drew strength from the print history of the legend and its embedding in both regional culture and intellectual polemic, it is bizarre that an opera which featured the same legend should experience equivocal and fluctuating reactions during its reception history, both at national and regional levels. Yet the regional symbolism which is retained in the legend, despite the sanitisation of later Christian additions, is transformed in the opera; consequently, the transmission of Breton cultural identity is subverted and references to the regional chains of memory which are vital for the construction and maintenance of that communal identity are ambivalent.

Lalo, who was born in Lille, did not possess a Breton pedigree on which he could draw for first-hand experience of the locale and its customs; similarly, his librettist, Édouard Blau (1836–1906), with whom he seems to have enjoyed a close working relationship and to whom he referred as ‘mon collaborateur’, was a native of Blois rather than Brittany. Lalo could, however, claim a Breton connection in that his wife, the contralto Julie-Marie-Victoire Bernier de Maligny, was of Breton origin.<sup>7</sup> His enthusiasm towards the region could, therefore, be said to benefit from convert-zeal, for this was Lalo’s second marriage, an alliance contracted in middle age, and was the means by which he finally recovered from a disastrous early connection and established himself as a *paterfamilias*.<sup>8</sup> In his adoption of the Breton legend of the drowned kingdom of Ys (also known as Is or Keris) for his opera, the first sketches of which were completed in 1875, Lalo paid tribute to his wife’s regional identity by

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<sup>6</sup> His early opera *Fiesque* was not performed in his lifetime; attempts to get *Le Roi d’Ys* into production in 1877 and 1878 were abandoned.

<sup>7</sup> The marriage took place in Paris on 6 July 1865.

<sup>8</sup> Lalo’s first marriage was to a widow, Zoé Labbé (d. 1864) on 20 July 1861, Paris.

providing a score in which the music for the principal female protagonist lay within her vocal range; he also nevertheless demonstrated a personal, aspirational identity shift akin to the modern, fluid European identities which Stuart Hall recognizes as 'poised, in transition, between different positions' and which 'draw on different cultural traditions at the same time.'<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Lalo's son, Pierre, noted the profound significance which the region came to assume for his father: 'Les séjours fréquents que depuis son mariage il faisait en Bretagne lui avaient inspiré pour ce pays un attachement très vif.'<sup>10</sup> Yet Lalo's choice of a Breton legend invokes implications that extend far beyond a desire to pay homage in some way to conjugal felicity or to relive pleasant Breton holidays. Myths and legends, in the context of opera, present a myriad of aesthetic possibilities for composers and librettists. Their narratives will have stood the test of time and may have entered the literary canon, although a certain amount of narrative detail will remain fluid and thus conveniently be available for manipulation. In addition, given their orally-transmitted provenance, they may be intimately associated with the conjuring of the sense of shared past which is a vital element in the construction, maintenance or rehearsal of specific cultural identities. Equally, they may function as markers of belonging and social cohesion, or offer extended possibilities for experimentation with the exotic 'other'.

The geographical or social *topos* of a legend is, moreover, inextricably linked to the folkloric elements of its nature and these inevitably provide opportunities to exploit

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<sup>9</sup> In S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew, eds., *Modernity and its Futures* (Cambridge and Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1992), p. 310.

<sup>10</sup> ['The frequent holidays which he spent in Brittany after his marriage inspired him with a deep attachment (to the region)'.]

Pierre Lalo, 'La Vie d'Édouard Lalo', *La Revue Musicale*, 4 (1923), p.122.

folk melody, local costume and specific regional social practices and customs. In a similar way, the location of the action of the story within the distant past of legend facilitates the possibility that events that have current social or political relevance can be safely explored by transferring them to mythical time. A legend has, in any event, the potential to transmit either a subtle and covert, or an obvious moral or religious message; it is thus imbued with symbolism and the potential to exploit that symbolism, however subliminally. Despite a specific location, the narrative, and in particular its ending, delivers universal truths and moral values; the dénouement of the plot inevitably contains powerful material relating to significant social control-mechanisms and will thus be jettisoned at peril in any subsequent re-telling. Nevertheless, any legend represents a prime source for refiguration and thus for involvement in interventionist social, political or aesthetic critiques; this fluid quality ensures its enduring power and continuing cultural resonance.

The multiple advantages of absorbing a well-known legend within an opera are nonetheless balanced by constraints, for any deviation from the original plot, or failure to transmit the mythical content through the libretto or music, risks a dilution of the powerful psychological and social subtexts of the narrative and thus invites a diminution of the dramatic significance. However, the strategies employed by Lalo and his librettist Blau in the making of *Le Roi d'Ys*, and in the incorporation of the original legend, reveal, in spite of the changes that were effected to the libretto source, an unexpected, if partial, alignment with the symbolism of the time-honoured story. Moreover, if, as E. O James has noted, 'the function of a myth is to validate and justify, conserve and safeguard the fundamental realities and values, customs and

beliefs on which depend the stability and continuance of a given way of life',<sup>11</sup> then both composer and librettist arguably attempted to reconcile the portents encoded in the embedded, regionally-specific symbolism of the original narrative with the need to conserve or promote the cultural values of the Parisian opera-going public at whom the work was aimed.

The Breton legend of the drowned city of Ys (Is or Keris) had long featured in the oral tradition of the region. During the early years of the nineteenth century, versions of the story began to appear in print so that its immediate and burgeoning accessibility to a wider public was effected. Moreover, the publications in which the story was included were those same writings that were identified at the time, and still remain, as core texts for the promotion of Breton nationalism. The legend was thus a crucial element in the establishment of Breton regionalism and was firmly implicated in what Strecker would define as the 'hard' nature of the resulting ethnic nationalism.<sup>12</sup> In this guise, it represented a potent potential force for the construction of 'resistance' identities which aimed to challenge cultural centralization and the imposition of legitimizing, hegemonic values.<sup>13</sup>

Of the varied forms of the narrative that were promoted at the beginning of the nineteenth century, three were of particular importance and relate to recorded oral tradition.

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<sup>11</sup> E. O. James, 'The Nature and Function of Myth' in *Folklore*, 68 (1957), p. 482.

<sup>12</sup> Strecker (1994), p. 49. See Chapter 1, pp. 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> See Castells (1997) in Chapter 1, pp. 16–17.

In Hersart de la Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz*,<sup>14</sup> the narrative is presented in verse and the story is given in a reduced, skeletal form.<sup>15</sup> In this version, entitled 'Submersion de la Ville d'Is', the King of Is is named as Gradlon, a fifth-century ruler whose spiritual adviser is Saint Gwennolé, the founder and abbot of the first Breton monastery. Gradlon's capital, Is, is surrounded and continually menaced by the sea but is protected from the waves by a system of locks to which only the king holds the key. Gradlon's daughter, the princess Dahut, in order to put the finishing touch to a night of debauchery, steals the key and unleashes the waters onto Is. The entire tragedy is predicted by Saint Gwennolé.

La Villemarqué identifies the story in his collection as a ballad sung in the locality of Trégunc and the nature of the succinct, sparse narrative suggests that this might be the earliest, widely-disseminated printed version of the legend.<sup>16</sup> However, 'Livaden Geris' ('The Submersion of Is') did not appear in the 1839 dual-language edition and its inclusion in the revised 1845 edition of the *Barsaz Breiz* seemed to respond to a version of the legend, 'Keris', recently published by another notable Breton writer, Émile Souvestre, in *Le Foyer breton* (1844), in which he gives a particular geographical location for his own variant of the legend, placing it within Cornouaille and specifying the Bay of Douarnenez as the site of Is.<sup>17</sup> Souvestre's narrative is considerably embellished; nevertheless he assiduously provides an authentic 'frame' for the story and establishes its oral provenance by means of a double narrative. The first-person narrator is ostensibly the author, the dedicated researcher who finds himself in the company of an old fisherman, a master storyteller, who, in turn, is

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 22–5.

<sup>15</sup> 'La submersion d'Is' in La Villemarqué (2003), pp. 101–105.

<sup>16</sup> The earliest known version is in Albert Le Grand's *Vie des Saints de La Bretagne Armorique*, 1637.

<sup>17</sup> 'Keris' in Souvestre (2000), pp. 157–165.



prepared to pass the time by relating the traditional story of a magical, lost, drowned kingdom.

In this narrative, the female protagonist, Dahut becomes a skilled magician commanding the korrigans (Breton goblins) of Vannes and Cornouaille who have, at her instigation, constructed a system of locks to protect her city of Keris from ingress by the sea. Her father, King Grallon,<sup>18</sup> has effectively abdicated and his withdrawal from public life has allowed moral degeneration to prevail in Is, where luxury and sexual excess, personified by the evil Dahut, are rife. Every night a new lover, his identity shielded by a magic mask, is conveyed to her tower above the lock gates. At dawn, the princess, having taken her pleasure, puts the mask back onto the lover's head, whereupon the mask spontaneously tightens and strangles the male victim. The corpse is then thrown from a cliff by a horseman dressed in black. A saint, this time identified as Saint Corentin, is at hand to inform the king of the depravity and sexual licence prevailing within his capital, but, in his isolation, Grallon chooses to ignore events.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Dahut's fancy alights on a newly-arrived and strangely powerful prince. This is, predictably, the devil himself who, having caused the citizens of the city and the princess to take part in a frenzied *danse macabre*, steals the keys of the lock gates and causes the power of the ocean to be unleashed. A *deus ex machina* in the form of Saint Corentin then emerges in order to rescue the king. However the king's flight is hampered by Dahut who leaps up behind him as he gallops away. Only Corentin's plea to jettison the princess, the allegorical burden of sin, provides for the possibility of redemption and, although the king hesitates, the saint strikes Dahut with his cross, causing her to disappear beneath the waves. Grallon is saved,

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<sup>18</sup> The name of the king is subject to minor alterations according to the version studied.

<sup>19</sup> Saint Corentin is associated with Quimper in Brittany. He is said to have been the first bishop of the cathedral that Gradlon, Comte de Cornouaille, erected there.

but the sinful city of Is has, in the meantime, perished beneath the ocean without trace.

The story of the submersion of Ys thus offered composer and librettist a thoroughly good story that had stood the test of time. The plot contained an excess of deviant sex and violence judged by any standards and the whole had the advantage of a dramatic and picturesque maritime setting. Even in this original form, Souvestre's narrative offered distinct potential for specific scenic elements in the form of the black rider, the red devil, the magic mask, korrigans and the tame sea monsters supposedly chained in the harbour of Is. In the postscript to a letter addressed to Hector Colard on 6 December 1875, Lalo acknowledges the potential of the legend for his dramatic and musical purposes:

Je termine un grand opéra en trois actes — *Le Roi d'Ys*. Le sujet est une des plus célèbres légendes de la Bretagne. [...] Dans la légende, c'est Satan qui rompt les digues; dans mon opéra c'est une femme qui ordonne ce joli petit travail.<sup>20</sup>

Although Huebner<sup>21</sup> cites two later publications by Souvestre — *Les Merveilles de la nuit de Noël* (1868) and *En Bretagne* (1867) — as possible sources of the version of the legend used in the libretto of *Le Roi d'Ys*, the existence of the earlier narrative and of other versions makes precise attribution difficult.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the story had been so widely disseminated and promoted during the lifetime of both librettist and composer that it is perhaps safer to acknowledge that, at the time of the genesis of the opera, the

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<sup>20</sup>['I am putting the finishing touches to a grand opera in three acts. The theme is one of the most famous of Breton legends. [...] In the legend it's Satan who opens the sluice gates: in my opera it's a woman who gets that nice little job done.']

Lalo, *Correspondance*, Fauquet, ed. (1989), Letter no. 189.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 238.

<sup>22</sup> Blau is said to have heard of the Souvestre story some twelve years before the first performance. See Huebner (1999), p.238, footnote.

legend represented received and common intellectual property. In all its forms, however, it retained particular, constant properties in much the same way that a fairy story possesses consistent elements that make it instantly recognizable, whether orally transmitted or in published form; nevertheless, it remained similarly fluid and capable of absorbing infinite nuances as its evolution progressed.

The subtle changes effected within Souvestre's telling of the story can, then, be perceived merely as one version of the narrative which, although arrested through publication in a particular form, nevertheless remained open to reinterpretation and reinvention because of its origins within an oral tradition; equally, the changes and manipulations which the legend underwent when it was transformed into an opera libretto can be acknowledged as evidence of the same process of evolution which guarantees the survival of a significant narrative. However, whilst the libretto, as Lalo hints in the postscript to the Colard letter, makes significant changes both to the list of protagonists and to events in the narrative, the operatic version of the Breton legend of the lost city of Ys represents more than a musical setting of a modified plot. Although Huebner argues that Blau, in manipulating elements within the original legend, 'thoroughly sentimentalized the story', <sup>23</sup> the alterations that were introduced in order to render the plot as suitable for the opera stage in fact retained the fundamental core of the source. *Le Roi d'Ys* not only remained essentially true to the Breton legend, but also unwittingly reflected the subtle shifts and nuances of a much older pagan, Celtic deluge- myth that had disseminated its own message throughout time and that still survived below the sentimentalized Christian overlay.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

The legendary Dahut, however, presented particular problems to the librettist. Her sexual excesses are shown to be legion in the published nineteenth-century narratives in which she is portrayed as the unredeemed personification of unalloyed evil. In addition, she is the main female protagonist, albeit an anti-heroine, and yet there is a sense that her disappearance in the legend does not offer complete psychological closure. As a female protagonist in charge of her own sexuality and one who, moreover, remains defiantly so, she invites comparison with Carmen, the eponymous heroine of Prosper Mérimée's 1845 novella which was the libretto source for Bizet's opera of the same name. Indeed, *Le Roi d'Ys* and *Carmen* share various similarities. *Carmen* was first performed in the year of *Le Roi d'Ys*'s composition (1875), both works have a specific geographical location which is available for compositional exploitation and both use a libretto developed from a work that rose to prominence in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Lalo was acquainted with Bizet whilst Blau, a prolific and respected librettist of his day, not only provided the words for a Bizet *mélodie*,<sup>25</sup> but was also the co-librettist for Bizet's operas *La Coupe du Roi de Thulé* and the unfinished *Don Rodrigue*. Composer and librettist would thus, as part of the Parisian music scene, have been well aware of the initial reception problems that beleaguered *Carmen*. In a moral climate that had rejected *Carmen* at its première at the Opéra-Comique and in which press criticism was unequivocally hostile to any representation of overt, unbridled female sexuality on the opera stage, the rampant sexual deviancy and sadistic amorality of the legendary Dahut were unlikely to find favour. Moreover the press attacks directed at Bizet's heroine seem to be equally applicable to Dahut:

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<sup>24</sup> The libretto for Bizet's *Carmen* was based on Prosper Mérimée's 'Carmen', *Revue des deux mondes* (1 October 1845).

<sup>25</sup> Georges Bizet, *La Chanson du rouet* (Paris: Choudens, 1880).

Peste soit de ces femmes vomies de l'enfer [...] ! L'état pathologique de cette malheureuse, vouée, sans trêve ni merci, aux ardeurs de la chair, est un cas fort rare heureusement, plus fait pour inspirer la sollicitude des médecins que pour intéresser d'honnêtes spectateurs venus à l'Opéra-Comique en compagnie de leurs femmes et de leurs filles.<sup>26</sup>

Lalo had from the outset, however, intended *Le Roi d'Ys* for the stage of the Paris Opéra. He had described it as 'un grand opéra' and the finished work designated the inclusion of five tableaux during the three-act duration of the opera. Moreover, a comparison of the constituent parts of *Le Roi* with David Charlton's list of essential elements for grand opera indicates that the premiered work fulfilled all of the criteria of the genre:

[...] historical crisis, a personal tragedy, regional character (focused through musical local colour), active choruses, dance, and political imperatives refracted from the distant past towards the composer's present.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, the nature of the dénouement of the plot, which, in the legend, encompasses the final submersion of Ys, seems to indicate that Lalo initially aimed to exploit the increased opportunities for elaborate stage design which the Opéra afforded. The moral standards to which plots and audience members at the Opéra aspired — unlike those prevailing at the Opéra-Comique, the venue of choice for respectable wives who were launching daughters on the bourgeois marriage market — were more ambivalent. Nevertheless, whilst aesthetic imperatives might have dictated the Opéra as the desired venue, an undiluted and unrefined transfer of the

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<sup>26</sup> ['A plague on these females spewed from hell [...]! The pathological condition of this wretched woman, doomed, without let or hindrance, to the fires of the flesh, is fortunately a rare case, more likely to attract medical attention than to interest clean-living spectators who have come to the Opéra-Comique with their wives and daughters.']

Jean Pierre-Oscar Comettant, *Le Siècle*, 8 March 1875.

<sup>27</sup> David Charlton, *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1.

character of Dahut from legend to libretto, and thence to the Opéra stage, would have been inconceivable. Lacombe notes that, in nineteenth-century opera, 'Traditionally the female character would stand on the sidelines'; he further acknowledges that ultimately 'the fate of all the major characters should be revealed, and [...] none of the problems set out in the play should go unresolved.'<sup>28</sup> Dahut, however, is the main protagonist in the legend and her disappearance beneath the waves does not represent closure or resolution; moreover her ambivalent identity, as La Villemarqué reveals in the *Barsaz Breiz* narrative, is rooted in Breton symbolism.

- As-tu vu, pêcheur, la fille de la mer, peignant ses cheveux blonds  
comme l'or, au soleil de midi, au bord de l'eau ?
- J'ai vu la blanche fille de mer, je l'ai même entendue chanter: ses  
chants étaient plaintifs comme les flots.<sup>29</sup>

Dahut's resurrection as a siren confirms her other-worldly status and prohibits any reading of her fate as punitive or redemptive; the dénouement of the legend merely returns her to her natural element, from whence, like many legendary figures, she is credited with the capacity to return.

Equally, the skeletal nature of the plot and the restricted cast of characters, in which only the princess and her demonic lover figure significantly, posed particular problems for the creation of a large scale operatic work. The challenge for the librettist and ultimately the composer was thus to retain those elements of the legend which promoted its fundamental message and embodied its essential identifying

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<sup>28</sup> Lacombe (2000), p. 111.

<sup>29</sup> ['Fisherman have you seen the daughter of the sea, combing her gold-blond hair by the sea's edge in the midday sun?  
I have seen the white daughter of the sea, I have even heard her sing; her songs were mournful like the waves.']  
La Villemarqué (2003), p. 103.

features, whilst expanding the original narrative to produce a work that would be commercially viable and thus acceptable to those on whom its success would depend.

To that end, Blau transformed Dahut. The central female protagonist of the legend became a pair of sisters, one innocent and transparently good (Rozenn), the other thwarted and obsessive (Margared). Each sister apparently acts as the foil to the other and both are in love with the same man, Mylio, a brave warrior who has led Ys to victory. The devil of the legend is transformed, via the libretto, into Karnac, the enemy prince with whom Margared has entered into a betrothal in order to satisfy the political imperative for a mutually beneficial dynastic alliance, whilst the minor roles of king and saint remain relatively unchanged.<sup>30</sup> Yet Lalo, however much he was constrained by both cultural and operatic conventions, revealed in a letter<sup>31</sup> to Victorin Joncières that the direction of his creativity had centred on the Dahut/Satan axis: '[...] les rôles qui m'ont passionné en écrivant *Le Roi d'Ys* sont ceux de Margared et de Karnak; le reste vient en surplus et m'est presque indifférent.'<sup>32</sup>

The division of the central protagonist of the legend, as both Huebner and Fauquet comment, apparently followed a standard operatic device.<sup>33</sup> Bizet and Meilhac had employed it in *Carmin*, introducing the role of Micaëla as a contrast to the wantonness of Carmen and allowing unselfish love to stand as a foil to unconstrained, predatory female sexuality.

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<sup>30</sup> The designated voice ranges are: Rozenn (soprano) Mylio (tenor) Karnac (baritone) Margared (mezzo soprano or contralto).

<sup>31</sup> ['The roles which excited me when I was writing *Le Roi d'Ys* were those of Margared and Karnak; the rest were additions and I remain almost indifferent to them.'] Lalo, *Correspondance*, Fauquet, ed. (1989), Letter no. 272.

<sup>32</sup> Victorin Joncières (1839–1903), composer and music critic of *La Liberté*.

<sup>33</sup> Huebner (1999), p.240. Joël-Marie Fauquet, 'Le folklore Breton dans *Le Roi d'Ys*, un antidote contre Wagner?', *L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 65 (1984), pp.16–21.

To dismiss the creation of Rozenn merely as a stock device of the librettist's craft is, however, to lose sight of the original legend which is subtly retained and subliminally transmitted within the opera. Rozenn is undoubtedly vital to the dramatic action of *Le Roi d'Ys* because she represents the binary opposite of those suppressed, intemperate passions of Margared that resonate with echoes of Dahut. Moreover, since the chorus in the opera represents the pliable populace and the passive king is distanced from the action, Rozenn fills a vital role in that she functions in the manner of a Greek chorus; she provides insight into the extent of Margared's wrongdoing and acts as the moral compass amidst the ensuing chaos. However, although she represents the antithesis of disorder, the main dramatic focus of the opera remains centred on the anti-heroine, Margared, and the lower female voice is the predominant dramatic vehicle. In addition, the ways in which the vocal range is exploited give the impression of a single personality divided rather than of two distinct characters. Together the music for both sisters covers the entire female vocal range from Rozenn's B above the stave down to Margared's A below it. Margared is also assigned little independent music within the opera; unlike Carmen and Micaëla, who remain dramatically and musically separate as well as spiritually and morally disparate, Margared shares much of her output with Rozenn or Karnac. Juxtaposed, Carmen and Micaëla do not constitute a whole. Margared and Rozenn, however, can be perceived to foreshadow, in some sense, the perception of the interdependent ego and id identified by Freudian psychology. The balance between base instinctive self and spiritual aspiration is always evident when they share vocal lines and in the Act I duet ('Margared, ô ma sœur – En silence pourquoi souffrir') the dovetailing of the two personalities is particularly striking.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> ['Margared, my sister – Why suffer in silence?']



Here, Margared's denial of personal distress and declaration of pride in her approaching wedding is expressed in a relentless, ragged vocal line spanning one and a half octaves in 2/4 time and punctuated by an abrupt accompaniment motif. Her psychological instability is apparent both in the frequent syncopations and in the final defiant G in the vocal line as her motif is heard in the accompaniment in association with the diminished seventh to indicate her concealed, precarious emotional state.

The lurking menace which emanates from Margared's unruly desires and which resonates with echoes of Dahut is, moreover, clearly transmitted in her motif which is more notable for its rhythm than its melodic content. The short motif (two demisemiquavers plus a semiquaver) signals atavistic femininity and, whilst it remains undeveloped in the Wagnerian sense, its contour is transformed according to the intensity of Margared's feelings; similarly, its position within the texture of the music alters in reaction to the extent to which the primeval forces that represent the essential Dahut of the legend are controlled or unleashed. When Rozenn asks why her sister is pale and why her eyes burn with a dark flame in the Act I duet, Margared's inner turmoil is translated into music purely by her rhythmic motif. While her feelings are suppressed, the motif consists of two notes of the same pitch separated by a note one semitone lower and is typically heard on the lower strings. However, as her repressed bitterness erupts, for example as she asserts mendaciously that happiness causes her to bow her head ('Et mon front ne s'incline — Que sous le poids du bonheur'),<sup>35</sup> the motif follows an upward, aggressive contour and is set against a prominent brass timbre.

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<sup>35</sup> ['And my forehead is only bowed — Beneath the weight of (my) happiness.']



Example 1: Margared's motif (VS, p. 43).

In contrast, the entry to Rozenn's aria is prepared by the brief orchestral statement of a melodic fragment which always characterizes tender feelings (Example 2). The vocal line, set to a reassuringly flowing 6/8, is conjunct, and as Rozenn asserts her Christ-like promise to redeem Margared's anguish by taking the emotional burden upon herself, the E flat major tonality remains unchallenged. Only when Margared interjects does any significant chromaticism obscure the tonality.

**Plus lent** ( $\frac{6}{8} = \text{♩}$ ) ROZENN s'approche de MARGARET et lui prend la main.

*dim. rit. pp*

ROZENN *de l'air*

En si - len - ce pourquoi souffrir?.. Dans mon cœur

*pp ben sostenuto*

*poco rit. a tempo poco più f*

é - pan - che ta pei - ne! Que la moi -

*surrez pp a tempo*

Example 2: Act I. Rozenn's tender feelings (VS, p. 43).

The effect that is created, however, is one of conscience in dialogue with self-will, since Rozenn's serenity is musically projected as a mediating force. As the duet progresses, the violent motif which recalls Dahut disappears; nevertheless, as the final cadence is heralded by a fermata on the dominant minor ninth chord over a tonic pedal (Example 3, bar 3), the relationship between the sisters is harmonically asserted. Margaret is allotted the minor ninth (C flat), thus demonstrating her



subdued but intransigent capacity for havoc; Rozenn, however, as the harbinger of serenity, is allotted the seventh (A flat) with its gravitational pull to resolution.

The musical score is for Act I, 'O my sister!' (VS, p. 49). It is written for two voices (Rozenn and Margat) and piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 2/4. The score includes lyrics in French and musical markings such as 'cresc.', 'rall.', 'f', 'rit.', and 'p'. The first system shows the vocal entries with lyrics: Rozenn: '-moi, Mar-ga - red, En-tends ma voix, O ma'; Margat: 'tu ne sau-rais me-gué-rir! O ma'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The second system shows the vocal parts continuing with 'sœur!' and the piano accompaniment with a 'rit.' marking.

Example 3: Act I. 'O my sister!' (VS, p. 49).

The strategy, then, employed by Lalo and Blau to embody the essential Dahut of the legend and to imbue her with enough pseudo-respectability to appeal to the opera audiences and entrepreneurs of the day, was to suggest a paradigm of intense inner personal struggle that foreshadowed, however unwittingly, modern psychoanalysis. The arias in which both sisters appear together and in conflict, whether implicit or explicit, are dramatically charged and amongst the most significant in the opera. The female protagonists are never merely juxtaposed in contrast since each shares, albeit

in a reduced form, the traits of the other. Rozenn thus displays a mirror image of Margared's tenacity of purpose in declaring that she would have been prepared to give up Mylio if he had been in love with her sister ('Si j'avais souffert de la même torture');<sup>36</sup> her steadfastness is directly reflected in Margared's equal determination to assert her own passion and win Mylio for herself.

Nevertheless, in spite of the dissimilarity between the portrayal of the Carmen/Micaëla relationship and that of Margared and Rozenn, a distinct rapprochement between the two works can be detected in the way in which both operas challenge patriarchal gender-role stereotypes. The affront to Parisian conservative critics which Carmen presented is moreover, eclipsed by the latent echoes of Dahut which are present in the dramatic and musical representations of Margared. Since Carmen represents the exotic 'other' and operates within her own liberal, bohemian subculture, she challenges accepted socio-cultural sexual values only by the selection of a partner governed by the mores of an opposing class and ethnicity. Margared, in contrast, possesses many of the characteristics of the stock fairy-tale figure. She is the king's eldest daughter, the princess for whom a significant union has been arranged. In refusing the dynastic alliance, and in bowing to the demands of intemperate desire, she threatens both the stability of the on-stage world which she inhabits and the accepted social and gender hierarchies of nineteenth-century bourgeois society.

Although the composer and librettist, by extending the cast of protagonists and by infusing them with psychologically accurate detail, inevitably sought to access the

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<sup>36</sup> ['If I had suffered from the same torment'].

attention and assuage the concerns of sophisticated cognoscenti, they nonetheless retained the primitive force of the Breton legend and its mythical origins; moreover, whilst the menace of Margared's challenge to patriarchy transmitted the original, authentic Dahut, the ambivalent relationship between the sisters in the opera ensured that the dramatic action remained true to more ancient sources. In a study which undertakes to evaluate the legend and its mythic foundations, *La légende de la Ville d'Is*, Françoise Le Roux and Christian J. Guyonvarc'h distinguish between folklore and myth:

[...] le mythe suppose une expression savante, ou au moins érudite, alors que le folklore est, dans son principe fondamental, essentiellement populaire, c'est à dire non intellectuel.<sup>37</sup>

They equally demonstrate that the origins of the central female protagonist remain equivocal and that the distinction between 'erudite' myth and 'popular' legend accounts for the ambivalent representations of Dahut. Although the nineteenth-century Dahut is presented as the antithesis of Christian moral values, earlier Irish and Welsh Celtic accounts credit her with more diverse and positive attributes. She appears as a sometime messenger from another world who chooses a mortal as her partner; she is also presented as a child of the sea, who ultimately returns to her natural element, or as the guardian of the waters who fails at her watch.<sup>38</sup> Blau's choice of name for the female protagonist of the opera, 'Margared', moreover, may not have been incidental; it seems to echo the mediaeval Welsh poem, 'Boddi Maes Gwyddno' ('The Drowning of the Plain of Gwyddno'), which had been used by La Villemarqué to amplify the Breton legend and in which 'Mererid', (Margaret), the

<sup>37</sup> ['... a myth presupposes knowledgeable expression or at least an erudite (approach), whereas folklore is, at heart, essentially popular and not intellectual.']

Françoise Le Roux and Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h, *La légende de la ville d'Is* (Rennes: Éditions Ouest-France, 2000), pp. 8 and 121–123.

<sup>38</sup> Diverse versions of the Celtic legend are traced in Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h (2000), pp. 61–88.

fountain cup-bearer, releases the power of the seas and attempts to escape on horseback.<sup>39</sup> Whilst later Christianised versions of the legend insist upon Dahut as personified evil in order to promote an allegory of the opposition of Christian and pagan values, such versions, steeped in popular culture, are dismissed by Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h as relying on '[...] un véritable conte pour touristes' in which 'la répétition et l'absence de toute contradiction [...] a donné force de loi.'<sup>40</sup> In allowing Rozenn to 'balance' Margared and in modifying the legend, composer and librettist thus not merely promoted the evolution of the narrative enshrined in folklore, but also, however unwittingly, retained the mythic origins of the story and transmitted its universal truths.

In the libretto, Blau nevertheless captured the essential nineteenth-century Dahut within the character of Margared. Musically, also, the primeval energy of the anti-heroine is accurately transmitted. In the aria which is axial to the entire drama and in which Margared asserts her obsessive determination to win Mylio for herself at any cost, 'Lorsque je t'ai vu soudain' (As soon as I suddenly saw you), Lalo seems to be intent on conveying Dahut's relentless sexual energy. Thus the 'A' sections of a conventional tripartite aria are infused with restless propulsion achieved by the syncopation of the orchestral accompaniment against a vocal line in which the musical phrasing is driven by Margared's desperate declaration which allows no pause for reflection and in which the impetus is guaranteed by the absence of a perfect cadence until the completion of the 'A' section when the words 'pour te conquérir', (to get you for myself) announce the desired musical and dramatic

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<sup>39</sup> James Doan, 'The Legend of the Sunken City', *Folklore*, 92 (1981), pp. 77–83

<sup>40</sup>['... a real story for tourists'] in which ['repetition and the absence of contradiction ensure that it has the force of law.']

Ibid., p.123.







M.   
 cœur — aussi — tôt — s'est pris à re-   
 - naî - tre Au feu — de — tes yeux, — au   
 son de ta voix — Sans — m'inqui-é-   
 - ter — de ceux que je bles - se, Au devant de

10   
 15   
 cresc.   
 f   
 p   
 fpp

My heart immediately began to live again  
 In the fiery light of your eyes, at the sound of your voice.  
 Without any care for those that I wound  
 I wanted to run to you,

20 *poco rit.* *a tempo*

M. *toi j'ai voulu cou\_rir Et l'empor\_te\_ment*

*cresc. suivez*

25

M. *de ma folle i\_vres\_se A tout*

*p cresc.*

*rit.* *a tempo*

M. *re\_ni\_é pour te conqué\_rir!*

*a tempo f suivez*

And my mad, exhilarated abandon  
 Renounced all in order to win you for myself.'  
 (VS, pp. 97-9).



The force and impact of the satanic figure within the legend are similarly retained in the opera as the intimation of demonic malevolence is instantly transmitted when Karnac is first introduced as the enemy warrior-prince whose projected alliance with Margared will bring peace to the beleaguered city of Ys. Once again, Lalo employs a jagged rhythmic motif (characterized by a dotted semiquaver, demisemiquaver and quaver ending) to indicate the persistent menace of the erstwhile enemy (Example 5). This motif is present and prominent immediately before Karnac's first vocal entry, and, unlike the motif which represents Margared, it is evident throughout the texture.

KARNAC. S'adressant au Roi. *f*

Désireux d'accomplir l'union résolue,

*ff*

K. *f*

Oubliant les débats qui nous armaient jadis,

*ff*

Example 5: Act I. Karnac's motif. 'Desirous of achieving the marriage on which we decided, Forgetting our former conflicts.'  
(VS, p. 71).

Karnac is thus revealed as a source of primitive and malign energy who displays undisguised menace even as he accepts the royal alliance and betrothal to Margared. As with Margared, the motif is subject to subtle variation according to the amount of demonic energy he expends. When inciting Margared to the fulfilment of her promise to destroy Ys, the jagged motif-ending predominates. In defeat, however, after the final conflict, the motif is propelled towards the bottom of the texture, and doubled in length as the final dotted semiquaver, demisemiquaver and quaver figure is replaced by a smoother, more pensive triplet (Example 6, bars 5–6). His character is nonetheless shown to be both immutable and unyielding.

The image shows a musical score for a scene from an opera. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is for a character named Karnac, indicated by the label 'KARNAC' at the top. The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. It starts with a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking, followed by 'a tempo'. The lyrics 'Perdu! je suis perdu!' are written below the staff. The second system is for a vocal soloist, indicated by the label 'K.' at the beginning. The lyrics 'Mon ar\_mée est dé-trui - te!' are written below the staff. The music continues with various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'f' (forte) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The score is numbered '5' at the top right and '18' at the bottom left.

Example 6: Act II, Scene 2. 'Lost! I am lost!' (VS, p. 138).

The use of rhythm to convey Karnac's menace is also reinforced by an infusion of tonal ambiguity. In the scene (Example 7) where his demonic intentions reach their apotheosis, he graphically and ironically describes the wedding night of Mylio and Rozenn in order to impel Margared to vengeance; the deviousness of his nature is, however, reflected by the switch from the secure E major which conveys the lovers' ecstasy, to an abrupt, unexpected modulation to A flat major (bar 10) which is immediately replaced by an area of tonal uncertainty. A series of diminished sevenths, which aptly transmit the emotional chaos which he is intent on arousing, takes the music back to E major as he finally forces Margared to contemplate the sounds of lovemaking that will be borne on the evening breeze. At this point his rhythmic motif is in abeyance since his diabolic purpose is all but accomplished.



The musical score is for Act III, Scene 1. It features a vocal part (M. and K.) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is D major (two sharps). The tempo is marked 'rit.' (ritardando) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes the following lyrics and musical markings:

**Vocal Part (M. and K.):**

- M. *se cou-rez - moi!* (56 = 0) 5
- K. *Il-s vont sor-tir de la cha-pel - le,*
- M. *da -*
- K. *da -*
- M. *da -*
- K. *da -*
- M. *Le cœur tremblant d'un doux é-moi! —*
- K. *Eu-ne son-geant: —*
- M. *il est à moi! —*
- K. *L'au-tre di-sant: Comme elle est bel-le!..*

**Piano Accompaniment:**

- Initial tempo: *rit.*
- First system: *ff* (fortissimo), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *ff* (fortissimo).
- Second system: *rit.*, *ff* (fortissimo), *mf* (mezzo-forte).
- Third system: *rit.*, *Orch. p* (orchestra piano), *qurez* (quartz).
- Fourth system: *avec ironie* (with irony), *dolce* (sweetly), *plus lent* (even slower).
- Fifth system: *10*, *dolcis.* (softly), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *express.* (expressive).
- Sixth system: *pp* (pianissimo), *pp* (pianissimo).

Example 7: Act III, Scene 1. 'They will leave the chapel (with) trembling heart(s) and sweet emotion(s). One will be dreaming: He is mine! The other will be saying: How beautiful she is!' (VS, p. 180).



en accentuant  
ironiquement

**1<sup>o</sup> tempo**

181

**animez**

3

20

*CFXC.*

E.t puis... ils s'en i - rent... et les vents embra -

*pp*

*pp*

MARGARID

25

*f affolée*

Tais-toi!

- sés l'ap - porteront ce soir le bruit de leurs bai - sers!

FLÛTE

*pp*

*pp*

And then they will go and tonight the restless evening breezes will bring you the sound of their kisses.' (VS, p. 181).

However, Lalo's deployment of the rhythmic motifs which retain the two main protagonists of the legend within the opera reveals itself as both subtle and eloquent. For, although Margared rejects the match with Karnac as soon as she receives the news of Mylio's survival, she is inexorably musically linked to Karnac by the rhythmic drive which demonstrates the similarities in their passionate, but flawed natures. Ironically, the spurned suitor is her ideal match and the close relationship between their respective motifs and the rhythmic thrust of the associated music



indicates the psychological alignment of their natures. Karnac reads Margared's character accurately and, by inducing a frenzy of loathing, seduces her into unlocking the protective sluices of Ys. As Margared screams for the destruction of all those she has once held in affection, the pinnacle of her uncontrolled hatred is signalled by her ascendant motif which significantly, in this guise, most closely approximates to the ending of Karnac's motif (Example 8, bar 5).

The musical score for Example 8 is written for four parts: Margared (M.), Karnac (K.), Flute, and Piano. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4. Margared's part (top staff) includes the lyrics "Taistoi!", "Ah! qu'ils périssent!", and "avec fureur". Karnac's part (second staff) includes the lyrics "le bruit de leurs baisers!". The Flute part (third staff) has a melodic line. The Piano part (bottom staff) has a rhythmic accompaniment with markings "cresc.", "ritard.", and "ff". The score is marked with "ff" (fortissimo) and "5" (quintuplet) in the final measure.

Example 8: Act III, Scene 1. Margared and Karnac united (VS, p. 181).

By the versatile deployment of rhythm, Lalo thus retains the satanic elements of the original legend and the essential impact of Dahut's malign character. Only after Margared's impassioned scream, 'Qu'ils périssent !' (Let them perish!), which signals the approach of dénouement of the plot, do the links with the original legend weaken along with the physical disappearance of Karnac and the 'dissolution' of Dahut in Margared as her rhythmic motif is abandoned. The narrative subsequently diverges



significantly from the original legend since Margared is ultimately brought to uncharacteristic repentance and atonement and, as a consequence, the power of the opera to transmit regional identity becomes ambivalent.

Yet there remains one central character, absent from the list of players in the frontispiece of both score and libretto, who is axial to plot, music and the transmission of ethnic identity. For it is the sea, persistently personified within the libretto, and subtly characterized throughout the music, which articulates the threatened chaos and further delineates the characters of the main protagonists. Rozenn, calm, controlled and dutiful senses no threat from the sea. She addresses it as ‘O mer profonde et sereine’ (‘O deep and serene sea’) and remains confident that it will return her lover safely. In the music that accompanies this reflection, Lalo allows a gently rocking bass rhythm to underpin the smoothly arching and falling vocal line, setting against this an equally unmenacing syncopated upper part that gives the effect of the waves breaking against each other. Since this is effectively a berceuse, the symbolic potential of the ocean, in its guise as the provider of nurture and solace, is exploited.

Plus calme

*douce*

O mer pro - fonde et se - rei - ne, Pourrais-tu sou - ri - re en

*mf* *suivre* *f* *p*

Example 9: Act I. Rozenn's sea (VS, p. 60).

However, Margared conveys the destructive potential of the sea and significantly, when she claims the elemental force of nature as an ally, it is at the moment when her sexual jealousy is a rising tide and her ungoverned passion is at its height. As she outlines revenge to the defeated and temporarily diffident Karnac, she asserts: 'N'avons nous pas un allié plus terrible que tous les hommes ? L'Océan !'<sup>42</sup> Lalo, however, in a telling flourish of word-painting, allows her final note above an E minor tonic chord to be engulfed by a chromatically rising bass line in contrary motion with a downward chromatic sweep in the upper parts.

MARGARED de plus en plus

N'avons nous pas un allié plus terrible que tous les

hommes, L'Océan!

ad lib. a tempo

suivez

Example 10: Act II, Scene 2. Margared's demonic ocean (VS, p. 142).

<sup>42</sup> ['Do we not have an ally more terrible than mankind? The Ocean!']



Previously, as Margared incites Karnac to vengeance, the same accompaniment figure is used at the identical pitch level to accompany the word 'hell'. It is in evidence when Margared reassures Karnac that, in spite of his doubts, hell is indeed listening to him. Throughout the entire transaction in which hell and the ocean are conflated, Margared's own rhythmic motif is also prominent. Thus Margared emerges as a primeval, demonic force with the capacity to annihilate an entire city; the ocean, meanwhile, is presented as the literal manifestation of elemental power and an allegory both of instinctive physical passion and social chaos.

The musical score is for Act II, Scene 2, 'Hell hears you!' (VS, p. 140). It features three systems of music. The first system shows Margared singing 'L'enfer t'écoute!' with a piano accompaniment marked 'a tempo' and 'ff'. The second system shows Karnac singing 'cou-te!' with a piano accompaniment marked 'a tempo' and 'ff'. The third system shows Margared singing 'L'enfer t'écoute!' with a piano accompaniment marked 'a tempo' and 'ff'. The piano accompaniment consists of a rhythmic motif of eighth notes and sixteenth notes, which is repeated throughout the scene.

Example 11: Act II, Scene 2. 'Hell hears you!' (VS, p. 140).

The retention of the essence of the original myth, and the legend which it inspired, however subliminally obscured beneath the character-changes and plot-manipulations within the opera, nevertheless relied on the inclusion of a range of additional regionally-specific markers and Breton symbols. From the beginning the opera was subtitled *Légende des guerres bretonnes au cinquième siècle*.<sup>43</sup> Joël-Marie Fauquet has indicated that this attribution represents a contradiction, combining a defined historical location with the less precise mystical aura of legend.<sup>44</sup> Yet this duality responded, whether consciously or inadvertently, to subtle notions of identity. To the intelligentsia with a stake in ethnic Breton nationalism the markers were obvious enough. The legend itself was, through oral tradition, embedded in regional consciousness and, through its print history, was an accepted element in the Breton cultural renaissance. The opera, to be successful, nevertheless needed to appeal to a wider audience base.

The historical reference in the first subtitle therefore offered a location that transcended the physical, and its assigned historical context effectively made it the cultural property of all Frenchmen rather than a uniquely Breton artefact. The post-Revolutionary era in France had, as a by-product of insistence on centralized power, seen the emergence of historical treatises which emphasized an overview of French history.<sup>45</sup> Regional events of the past were examined, but portrayed as relevant to the background of the construction of the unified nation. Indeed, implicit to the understanding of such studies was the notion that the great and glorious nation demonstrated its enlightened state of civilization by measuring its distance from its

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<sup>43</sup> ['Legend of the Breton Wars of the Fifth century'].

<sup>44</sup> Fauquet (1984), p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Notable treatises were those of Guizot, Thierry, and Sismondi.

fragmented and regionally-centred past. Augustin Thierry, in *Considérations sur l'histoire de France*, thus cautioned against:

[...] le réveil des antiques rivalités et des haines héréditaires de canton à canton et de ville en ville : partout une sorte de retour à l'état de nature, et l'insurrection des volontés individuelles contre la règle et la loi, sous quelque forme qu'elles se présentent, politique, civile ou religieuse.<sup>46</sup>

The dramatic action of *Le Roi d'Ys* is demonstrably concerned with old feuds and the overthrow of the rule of law — the same archaic rivalries which promoted the construction and valorisation of national collective memory at the expense of regional social cohesion. However, whilst the subtitle for Lalo's original sketches was ultimately abbreviated for the final version to *Légende Bretonne*, Lalo is nonetheless at pains to signal musical material that is, allegedly, specifically Breton and a footnote is provided in the score to indicate the inclusion of Breton themes. There are three such incidences during the opera and the first occurs in Act I where the second number for the chorus ('Les guerres sont terminées') is designated in the score as a 'Thème breton'.

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<sup>46</sup> Augustin Thierry, *Considérations sur l'histoire de France* (1835–40), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/Fonds> (Accessed 31 December 2001).

['... the awakening of ancient rivalries and hereditary hatred from canton to canton and from town to town: a sort of universal return to a state of nature, and the rebellion of individual wills against rule and law in whatever forms they present themselves, political, civil or religious.']



**Même mouv! (♩ = 84)** (\*) *mf*

**Soprani.**  
Les groupes, joyeux, échangent des félicitations. Les guerres sont

**Contralti.**  
Les guerres sont

*ff*

ter-mi-né-es, Voi-ci pour nous dé-sormais — Les tranqui-les

ter-mi-né-es, Voi-ci pour nous dé-sormais — Les tranqui-les

des-ti-né-es, Les doux tra-vaux de la paix! Les glai-ves, sur

des-ti-né-es, Les doux tra-vaux de la paix! Les glai-ves, sur

(\*) THÈME BRETON

Example 12: Act I. 'The wars are over. / For us, from now on/ Peaceful futures/ Sweet peacetime tasks!' (VS, p. 30).

This folk tune, sung by the women of Ys as they celebrate the end of the wars achieved by the proposed marriage of Karnac and Margared, is closely related to folk dance. In 2/4 time, it allows for two short, followed by two longer running steps with a hopped step on the fourth quaver of the bar. Choreographically this would seem to imply danced song — a staple of Brittany's folk heritage — since there is a break for breath as the foot rests and the antecedent and consequent of the phrasing are mirrored in the potential patterns of movement. Moreover the implied nature of the dance lends itself to line or circle formations which represent the oldest forms of Breton dance.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, within the same scene, a second folk tune is introduced almost immediately after the first; this additional Breton air, 'C'est lui, c'est notre maître',<sup>48</sup> is again given to the chorus. It is, moreover, linked to the previous Breton theme by the seasonal refrain 'Noël!' which punctuates both Breton tunes and with which the opera opens. Eugen Weber has noted the remarkable regional survival of Christmas songs: '[...] though the traditional groups that went round singing them were gradually driven out of cities, the noëls went on being sung in original versions at least to the end of the century.'<sup>49</sup> The seasonal character of the Breton themes in the opera is, however, apparently diluted since Blau's libretto attaches no religious significance to the refrain; it is deployed as a general expression of rejoicing to celebrate the forthcoming marriage of the princess to the erstwhile-enemy prince, the cessation of hostilities and the king's imminent arrival. Nevertheless, the conflation of the 'noël'

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<sup>47</sup> See 'Pays et danses', *Musique Bretonne: histoire des sonneurs de tradition*, Ouvrage collectif, (Douarnenez: Le Chasse-Marée, ArMen, 1996), pp. 140–152.

<sup>48</sup> ['Here he is, our master']

<sup>49</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 434.

with an act of local, specific celebration is entirely consistent with the ways in which such Christmas carols were regionally inflected. Weber also notes significantly that:

Noëls may be the place where we find the common people's claims expressed most openly, and where their hopes and aches are most clearly articulated.

He also cites a Bourbonnais 'noël' which begins with the same sentiments that are proclaimed in the opening chorus numbers of the opera:

We'll see the war come to an end;  
Here are the good times coming back.<sup>50</sup>

This insistence on authentic Breton material at the beginning of the work is significant. It establishes the ethnic roots of the dramatic material from the outset in a way which is comparable to the establishment of the tonic in sonata form, so that even as the action diverges from the 'exposition' of initial cultural embedding, there is a sense of material to which a return will be made and which characterizes the work. Indeed the ethnicity of the work can be seen as a structural device. The 'recapitulation' of specifically identified regional material appears at the beginning of Act III in the Breton Wedding where Lalo labels music for the chorus in the 'Chanson de la mariée'<sup>51</sup> as Breton.

An undated note signed by Lalo affirms that the Breton folk tunes included in the opera were acquired through oral transmission: 'Je ne me suis servi d'aucun recueil et n'en connais pas. La famille de Mme Lalo est bretonne et les airs dont je me suis servi m'ont été chantés par elle.'<sup>52</sup> This assertion is, nevertheless, open to

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<sup>50</sup> Weber (1976), p. 434.

<sup>51</sup> ['Bride's Song']

<sup>52</sup> Lalo in Fauquet (1984), p. 19.

['I did not use any folk song collection and had no knowledge of one. Madame Lalo's family is from Brittany and the melodies that I used were sung to me by her.']



interpretation. The folk tune which appears in the bride's music has been firmly attributed to the Île de France rather than to Brittany. Fauquet (1984) has suggested the likelihood that the two Act 1 folk melodies are Breton without indicating an actual source. Confusion remains, not merely because Lalo himself rejected the implication that he had recourse to specific collections of ethnic music, but because the earlier 1875 sketches were destroyed by the composer at the time of the opera's original rejection. By the time of the revisions, Lalo's friend, the composer and ethnomusicologist Louis Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray, was in the process of producing his own collection of Breton folk tunes. However, the presence of the folk melodies in the first sketches, were these to exist, would suggest that Lalo had indeed availed himself of orally transmitted material rather than taking advantage of the fruits of Bourgault-Ducoudray's research.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, although firm attribution remains elusive, the composer's determined claim to an ethnic identity for the three melodies is significant. The opera was intended from the first for the Parisian stage and Lalo had circumvented the possibility of a second rejection at the time of his revisions by offering *Le Roi* to the publishing house of Hartmann for publication prior to performance in Paris in 1886. The aim and direction of Lalo's emphasis on regional identity within the score, therefore, remains enigmatic.

No evidence whatsoever exists that Lalo ever intended, for example, to build on the references to folk melody in the opera by including folk instruments in the orchestration. Brittany can and did boast an array of such instruments, the most

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<sup>53</sup> Louis Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray, *Trente mélodies populaires de Basse-Bretagne* (Paris and Brussels: Lemoine, 1885).

significant being the *bombarde* (shawm), the *biniou* (bagpipes) and the Celtic harp.

The plaintive oboe timbre, the closest modern orchestral equivalent to that of the *bombarde*, is certainly deployed within the opera for specific emotive effect and it is given the first solo entry in the overture (Example 13, bars 4–8). The prominence of the oboe in the texture here is nonetheless unrelated to folk idiom, since this first plaintive oboe entry closely recalls the melodic outline and chromatic harmonies of the opening of Wagner’s Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*.

The image shows a musical score for the Overture of 'Le Roi d'Ys'. The title 'OUVERTURE' is centered at the top. Below it, the tempo and mood are indicated as '(4/8 = ♩)' and 'And: ben sostenuto.'. The score is for piano, with the instrument name 'PIANO.' written on the left. The oboe part is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The oboe entry is marked 'p' and 'espress.'. The piano accompaniment features a chromatic descending line in the right hand and a more static bass line. The overall texture is plaintive and evocative.

Example 13: The oboe entry (VS, p. 1).

A similar rejection of folk-idiom and absence of specific, ‘regional’ instrumentation can be detected in a *mélodie* which Lalo wrote between 1880 and 1884 and which is therefore chronologically placed between the 1875 sketches of *Le Roi d'Ys* and the first performance of the opera. The ‘Chant breton’<sup>54</sup> uses the oboe for emotive effect but avoids any inference of folk or regional colouring. Noske (1970) gives full credit

<sup>54</sup> Édouard Lalo (ca. 1884), Op. 31, ‘Chant breton’, words by Albert Dépit (Paris: Hamelle).

to Lalo's skill within the genre of *mélodie* but marvels at the lost opportunity for the inclusion of musical *couleur locale*:

Lalo unerringly grasps what we have called the interior atmosphere of the poem while rejecting local colour, although the texts of 'L'esclave' and 'Chant breton' offer ample opportunity for it. And this is the same composer who in *Symphonie espagnole*, *Fantaisie norvégienne*, and *Concerto russe* shows such skill in handling musical geography!<sup>55</sup>

If Lalo had intended to solicit regional interest for his opera with a view to augmenting the enthusiasm of its reception at Breton opera houses, however, the inclusion of regionally-specific folk melody had no discernable effect. The regions clearly wanted what had proved popular in Paris and, although the opera remained a regular part of the Paris repertoire until 1954, it never achieved a status within Brittany which reflected particular respect for the regional markers it contained. Figures relating to the numbers of productions of *Le Roi d'Ys* given in the regional capital of Rennes in the years that followed the first Paris production indicate no significant popularity compared to any other production transferred from the Paris Opéra or Opéra-Comique stage.<sup>56</sup> In the nineteenth-century seasons when *Le Roi d'Ys* was performed in Rennes — 1888–1889, 1889–1890 and 1894–1895 — the number of performances totalled sixteen. The number of performances in the first year was nine, the exact number achieved by *Carmen* when it was first staged in Rennes during the 1880–1881 season. In its first three seasons, *Carmen* was given on eighteen occasions, thus outstripping the tally of the *Le Roi* stagings over the initial three years of its own actual performances.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Frits Noske, *French Song from Berlioz to Duparc: The Origin and Development of the Mélodie*, trans. by Rita Benton (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 242.

<sup>56</sup> The first performance in Rennes took place on 22 December 1888. The first performance in Brittany was in Brest.

<sup>57</sup> Archives municipales de Rennes, 3R7.

In her detailed study of musical life in Rennes in the nineteenth century, Marie-Claire Le Moigne-Mussat identifies a regional 'goût pour le pittoresque, la couleur locale'<sup>58</sup>, yet this is conflated not with a liking for Breton-specific references but with a general appreciation of local colour in works which could demonstrate adept orchestration combined with a poetic libretto. Massenet, whose output made no use of Breton symbolism, is identified as fulfilling these criteria and therefore as having had a particular appeal to the opera-going public of Rennes during the Belle Époque. Significantly, Le Moigne-Mussat cites a review in *Le Petit Rennais* of 26 December 1888 which commented on the Rennes première of *Le Roi d'Ys* and referred to it as an example of the French school, since: '[L'opéra] paraît porter la marque d'un génie essentiellement français.'<sup>59</sup>

At a local level, the success of the work was thus primarily measured in terms of its reflection of Parisian taste and its ability to transmit national, rather than regional, identities. It was valued for those characteristics which indicated the establishment or retrieval of a national musical identity which, in turn, promoted the notion of a unified France whose component regions would serve merely to emphasize the indivisibility of the whole. Breuilly (1993) has noted that 'the identity of the nation will be related to "tradition" and to existing cultural practices, but the decision as to what is relevant and how it should be used in establishing the national identity will rest with the state.'<sup>60</sup> Reception of *Le Roi* in Brittany suggests that the regional markers embedded in the traditional legend had, along the route from libretto source

<sup>58</sup> ['... a taste for anything picturesque and for local colour'].

<sup>59</sup> ['(The opera) seemed to bear the hallmark of an essentially French genius.']

Cited in Marie-Claire Le Moigne-Mussat, *Musique et Société à Rennes au XVIII et XIX siècles* (Genève: Éditions Minkoff, 1988), p. 340.

<sup>60</sup> John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 63.

to Parisian première, become sufficiently diluted or reshaped as to render the work more readily associable with central hegemonic concerns than with regional folklore; equally, however, the political potential of the work as a vehicle for the 'nation's image' was tacitly acknowledged.

Stage design, as well as instrumentation, notably avoided ethnic references, and in spite of the insertion of the Breton Wedding in Act 3, the rich vein of local custom and costume which had been tapped by the design team of Meyerbeer's *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* seems to have been consistently ignored as a source of inspiration for the staging of *Le Roi d'Ys*. Designs for the first and subsequent productions drew inspiration from a mediaeval timescape (as, indeed, did the Luminais painting of 1884) rather than from contemporary regional costume. Nevertheless, the wedding in Act III transmits, through the libretto and music, specific ethnic markers which actual productions have consistently ignored.

The first tableau of Act III of the opera is labelled in the score as 'Noce Bretonne'<sup>61</sup> and the music for chorus and arias associated with that tableau are widely accepted by musicologists as offering some of Lalo's best output in the entire opera. Georges Servières, writing after Lalo's death, described it as 'musique ravissante',<sup>62</sup> whilst Cooper goes further to declare that it is 'probably the best thing Lalo ever did, for it combines freshness with a natural elegance, clear linear design with colour and feeling.'<sup>63</sup> Comment has, however, neglected to identify the transmission of ethnic

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<sup>61</sup> ['Breton Wedding'].

<sup>62</sup> Georges Servières, *Les Musiciens Célèbres: Édouard Lalo* (Paris: Laurens, 1925), p. 69. ['delightful music']

<sup>63</sup> Martin Cooper, *French Music: From the death of Berlioz to the death of Fauré* (Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 37.

identity served by both music and libretto and the implications of that transmission for the reception history of the opera.

In the scene which precedes the nuptial procession to the chapel, the wedding preparations take on a particular character. When the steward, Jahel, speaks to the bridegroom (Mylio) and his supporters, he announces:

JAHIEL

Vous qui venez ici chercher notre maîtresse,  
Il faut suivant l'antique usage de l'Armor,  
Envoyés de l'époux, que votre vœu s'adresse  
Aux gardiennes de ce trésor.<sup>64</sup>

His invitation to the groomsmen uses the ancient name for Brittany (Armor) and signals the commencement of a ritual which, although abbreviated for the stage, nevertheless echoed actual Breton wedding custom as it had been depicted in those publications which had first alerted Paris to the existence of that familiar, yet exotic realm which lay within travelling distance of the capital. The ancient custom to which he refers takes the form of a ritual demand for the bride, Rozenn. Symbolically, the young men's request is an allegory of assault upon virginity as they demand that the maidens, the guardians of the treasure, open the door and release the bride to her waiting betrothed. The young women, in their turn, deny entry in such a way that ultimate capitulation is a foregone conclusion, even though they acknowledge that the married state represents the loss not merely of virginity, but also of actual freedom and pleasure.

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<sup>64</sup> ['You envoys of the groom who come to seek our mistress must, according to Armor's ancient custom, address yourselves to the maidens who guard this treasure.']

Both La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz* and Souvestre's *Les Derniers Bretons* contain similar accounts of Breton wedding customs. Souvestre's version<sup>65</sup> is specifically linked to Cornouaille (Finistère), the region most closely associated with the legend of the lost city of Ys.<sup>66</sup> It describes the demand for the bride (made on the groom's behalf by the *Bazvalan*) and the bride's response (formally voiced by the *Brotaër*).<sup>67</sup>

Dès le matin, le tailleur, ou Bazvalan, se présente, accompagné du futur et de ses parents. La famille de la jeune épouse se tient sur le seuil de la porte avec un autre rimeur chargé de répondre en son nom et que l'on appelle le Brotaër.<sup>68</sup>

These opposing stances offer an obvious opportunity to both composer and librettist to provide music for the chorus by replacing the family groups mentioned in the Breton texts by two gender-differentiated vocal groups. Dramatically, the absence of the *Brotaër* and *Bazvalan* from the libretto can, moreover, be explained by the difficulties posed by the extended and allegorical nature of the ritual dialogue that they exchange and by the inadvisability of introducing such significant characters at a late stage in the plot. Yet, although it may seem that the echoes of Breton custom are accidental and that the inclusion of a wedding scene is merely an operatic device aimed at either providing a spectacle in the tradition of grand opera or ensuring that the main protagonists are accorded a respite before the vocally-demanding dénouement, the echoes of the regional nuptial practices outlined by La Villemarqué and Souvestre are nonetheless clearly detectable.

<sup>65</sup> Souvestre (1997), pp. 83–95.

<sup>66</sup> Quimper in Finistère is said to have been founded by the broken-hearted Gradlon after the destruction of Ys. The king's statue surmounts Quimper cathedral.

<sup>67</sup> 'Brotaër' is spelt as 'Breutaer' in the *Barsaz Breiz*.

<sup>68</sup> ['From the morning onwards, the tailor, or *Bazvalan*, presents himself in the company of the future husband and his relations. The young bride's family stand at the threshold of the door with another poet called the *Brotaër* who has the job of speaking on her behalf.']

In La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz*, the *Bazvalan*, speaking for the groom, his 'pigeon', describes a beautiful 'dove', the bride, who has been lost, and requests the return of the bird or knowledge of its whereabouts. In response, the *Brotuër* enters the bride's home, returning on three successive occasions to deny the presence of the creature and, in so doing, to ritually impede the groom's access to the bride.

#### BAZVALAN

Mon pigeon blanc sera trouvé mort, si sa compagne ne revient pas ; il mourra mon pauvre pigeon; je vais voir à travers la porte.<sup>69</sup>

#### BREUTAER

Halte-là ! l'ami, on ne passe pas ; je vais voir moi-même.<sup>70</sup>

This interchange of request and denial, and the symbolism of virginity defended yet destined to succumb, find a direct counterpart in the demands made by the young men from Mylio's party and the maidens who defend the bride at the door to Rozenn's apartments at the beginning of Act III in *Le Roi*:

#### JEUNES GENS

Ouvrez cette porte à la fiancée  
Avec nous bien vite elle s'en ira.

#### JEUNES FILLES

Non !  
D'un espoir trompeur votre âme est bercée  
Celle que l'on réclame ici restera.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> ['My white pigeon will be found dead if his companion does not return; he will die, I'm going to look over the threshold.']

<sup>70</sup> ['Stop right there, my friend, you can't go in; I'll go and check myself.']

La Villemarqué (2003), pp. 429–432.

<sup>71</sup> ['THE YOUNG MEN

Open the bride's door

Soon she'll be going away with us.

THE YOUNG GIRLS:

No!

You're deluding yourself with false hope,

The one you seek is staying here.']



It therefore seems likely that Lalo or Blau, or both, may have been acquainted not only with the legend itself in its printed versions, but also with other associated material that was capable of transmitting regional identity. Further evidence can be discovered in the maidens' expression of concern that implicit in the exchange of sexual favours, and in the reality of the feminine gender-role within marriage, is the notion of bondage:

#### JEUNES FILLES

Rien n'est si doux que la liberté —  
Cet amant bientôt fera place au maître,  
La porte pour lui ne s'ouvrira pas.<sup>72</sup>

This is again a concentrated expression, abbreviated to serve the needs of the stage, of the lengthy bride's lament which is listed by Souvestre as an essential element in the wedding transaction:

Peines et fatigues m'attendent: trois berceaux au coin du feu.  
Il faut que je reste ici; je ne suis plus qu'une servante, jeunes filles, car je suis mariée !<sup>73</sup>

Given these clear regional markers, the comparatively moderate success of *Le Roi d'Ys* when the first productions were given in Rennes appears to contradict the overwhelming significance of ethnic belonging which Cynthia Enloe has noted.<sup>74</sup> The regional references that might have promoted a unique sense of community identity in the face of centralized cultural uniformity were, if not shunned, then at least accorded no undue welcome. The reception of the work remains ambivalent to

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<sup>72</sup> ['THE YOUNG GIRLS

Nothing is sweeter than freedom —

This lover will soon become the master,

The door will never be opened for him.']

<sup>73</sup> Souvestre (1997), p. 94.

[Pain and weariness await me: three cradles in the corner by the fire.

I have to stay here; I'm no more than a servant, young girls, because I'm married!]

<sup>74</sup> See Enloe (1986) in Chapter 1, p. 1.

this day as a comparatively recent exhibition, given at the Musée Départemental Breton in Quimper in 1994, demonstrates.

The catalogue of this exhibition, *La Bretagne à l'Opéra*,<sup>75</sup> emphatically rejects any suggestion that the opera should be considered as 'Breton', and in spite of acknowledging that the opera is the unique survivor in the contemporary repertoire of operas containing Breton references, Marie-Claire Mussat, a principal contributor to the exhibition catalogue, unequivocally defends the omission of *Le Roi* on the grounds that it fails to cater for the picturesque; the inclusion of lesser known and arguably less musically attractive works is, however, clearly related to their provision of *couleur locale*:

Parmi les œuvres recensées, le drame de Lalo faisait en effet exception, situant son action dans une Armorique du haut Moyen Age antérieure de plusieurs siècles à la Bretagne traditionnelle des costumes, des pardons et des cornemuseux, qui avaient inspiré les compositeurs, les chorégraphes et les décorateurs que nous désirions évoquer.<sup>76</sup>

The rationale backing the exclusion of *Le Roi d'Ys* from the 1994 exhibition apparently acknowledges the parameters which had increasingly distinguished 'la Bretagne bretonnante' (Bretonized Brittany) from the time of Meyerbeer's *Pardon de Ploërmel* onwards. However curious anomalies are evident in the approach to the selection of operas demonstrating Breton qualities and thus deemed worthy of inclusion. Paul le Flem's *Le Rossignol de Saint Malo* like *Le Roi* makes use of a story culled from La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz* and is similarly chronologically located

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<sup>75</sup> Musée Départemental Breton, Exhibition catalogue of *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* (Quimper: Imprimerie du Commerce, 1994), p. 20.

<sup>76</sup> ['Amongst the works included in the list, Lalo's drama was an exception, placing its action at the height of the Middle Ages and several centuries before the traditional Brittany of costume, religious pardons and bagpipers which inspired the composers, choreographers and stage designers that we wanted to present.']

within the Middle Ages. Photographs of the first performance which are included in the Quimper catalogue demonstrate that costume design in this instance also referred to the Medieval rather than the local. Nonetheless, *Le Rossignol de Saint Malo* is selected for inclusion and accorded a significant entry in the catalogue. In spite of the omission of Lalo's opera, the catalogue devotes significant coverage to a production of Adolphe Adam's ballet *Giselle* given at the Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris in 1991.<sup>77</sup> The only claim which this work can lay to any Breton connection — it is based on a German ballad by Heine — is the use of Breton costume and scenery for the 1991 stage design. The exclusion of *Le Roi d'Ys*, which still clings, however precariously, to its repertoire status and which boasts a libretto source firmly rooted in Breton iconography, oral testimony and print history, appears in this light, if not sinister, then at least significant.<sup>78</sup>

However, controversy surrounding print-versions of the legend and concerns about the way in which a 'traditional Brittany' might be presented in order to assure both its recognition and survival beyond the exercise of centralized cultural hegemony are not restricted to recent polemic. Renascent interest in Breton nationalism was compromised at the time of the original genesis of *Le Roi* since the authenticity of the publication which had initially attracted fashionable, intellectual and critical attention towards the region — La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz* — was undergoing intellectual scrutiny within the region<sup>79</sup> as well as in Paris.<sup>80</sup> Any denouncement of the *Barsaz*

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<sup>77</sup> *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* (1994), pp. 100–113.

<sup>78</sup> A later exhibition specifically devoted to the legend of Ys was mounted at the Musée Départemental Breton in June–October, 2002. Lalo's opera was represented by a display of Félix Labisse's costume designs for the 1966 Palais Garnier production; however, the main attraction of the display was a 'reconstruction' of the legendary city which attempted to unite fact and fantasy; other exhibits featured the treatment of the legend in cartoons and art in general. The exhibition and associated CD-ROM featured music by Mark Ruz and the group Tir Na Nog.

<sup>79</sup> Laurent, *ArMen*, 18, p. 43, cites 1872 as the year when the integrity of the *Barsaz Breiz* was increasingly questioned within Brittany.

*Breiz* inevitably represented a radical challenge to Breton regional identity because the work was inscribed into the collective memory of the region; equally, any artistic work which was based on that collection of folk materials was potentially implicated in the resulting polemic.

Lalo and Blau, in drawing on the works of Souvestre and La Villemarqué and in advertising the Breton pedigree prominently in both score and libretto, had, moreover, contributed significantly to the print-history of the legend. They were also and, most significantly for the reception history of the opera, treading a fine line between ethnic nationalism and the expression of centralized nationalism which, by glancing fondly at its distant, constituent parts, could augment its own sense of cultural supremacy. Thus the dilution of regional identity consequent upon the loss of the Breton language from later editions of the *Barsaz Breiz* as the process of print capitalism fuelled its insertion in the cultural life of the capital, and the polemic initiated by challenges to its authenticity, provide a relevant context for Lalo's initial failure, in 1879, to find a willing backer for the opera and for the subsequent reception of *Le Roi d'Ys* when it reached the Parisian and provincial stages. Lalo and Blau, having elected to use and yet manipulate this particular legend, may well have unwittingly produced a work which neither totally appealed to nineteenth-century Breton notables nor guaranteed its subsequent recognition as a Breton work as its reception history progressed.

Moreover, at the time when *Le Roi d'Ys* was conceived, ethnic Breton nationalism, although in its infancy, stood at a crossroads. Recent events in Brittany had brought the region into a new sense of isolation from the capital. The Armée de Bretagne, an

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<sup>80</sup> See Chapter I, p. 24, footnote.

army of 96,000 volunteers in the Franco-Prussian War, had in December 1870, been left in winter quarters at Conlie without the necessary provisions and support.<sup>81</sup> Falling victim initially to disease and malnutrition, the troops were slaughtered at The Battle of Le Mans in January 1871 by the Prussian army. The politician held to be responsible for the tragedy was Gambetta — the repository of central power — and the author of the report which exposed the shortcomings of central administration was none other than the Breton historian Arthur de la Borderie. Since ‘hard’ regionalism, according to Strecker, is born of ‘procrustean conflict’,<sup>82</sup> the nature of regionalism within Brittany itself and amongst intellectuals at this time was inevitably calcifying. In the light of this background of mutual political unease between capital and region, and the intellectual challenges to the authenticity of the *Barsaz Breiz*, the initial rejection of *Le Roi* seems to have a plausible explanation, even if this was not overtly acknowledged at the time.

Yet the opera achieved success in Paris when Lalo, having thoroughly revised it in 1886, managed to get it staged at the Opéra-Comique. The intervening years had themselves brought about shifts in the nature, manifestation and appeal of regionalism which allowed the work to gain recognition. Reece has noted a particular pattern which is discernable in the vital role played by intellectuals in the exercise and impact of regionalism. He acknowledges a first stage in which intellectuals, having initially rejected regional socio-cultural characteristics, are frustrated by the larger society which denies them a full role and are marginalized. Their talents are then redirected towards the ethnic community:

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<sup>81</sup> Jack Reece, *The Bretons against France: Ethnic Minority Nationalism in Twentieth Century Brittany* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p.22.

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 11.

It even happens that those ethnic traits they formerly regarded as marks of inferiority [...] a rustic folk dialect, mysterious religious practices, picturesque costumes and an obscure folk-lore become objects of 'national' pride. Before long they have transformed all these traits into positive group values on which the ethnic nationalist depends.<sup>83</sup>

The 'ethnic traits' distinguished by Reece are, however, the very traits that indicate the development of what Strecker defines as 'soft' regionalism.<sup>84</sup> When this is in operation, 'procrustean conflict' with central power is in abeyance and a sense of belonging to the centrally governed, unified nation is enhanced by a re-evaluation of what might once have appeared as narrow provincialism. It is thus possible to distinguish the role played by Breton intellectuals as pivotal to the shift from the 'hard' regionalism that festered at the heart of the *Barsaz Breiz* debate towards 'soft' regionalism. The years between 1876 and 1888 that separated the conception of *Le Roi* and its first performance saw just such a shift take place in the perception of the region by intellectuals.

Yet if the regional identity of the opera and the equivocal reaction to expressions of that identity in the reception history of the work present an enigma, then the establishment of musical identity is equally open to question. After the first performance, an enthusiastic letter written by Louis de Fourcauld<sup>85</sup> declared that German music would now have to contend with a serious rival:

Mais devant *Le Roi d'Ys*, il faudra qu'ils baissent pavillon, bon gré, mal gré ! Pas un de leurs compositeurs actuels ne pourrait écrire un œuvre de cette profondeur et de cet éclat. Ensuite, cela est français; cela ne pouvait venir que d'un Français. Quoi qu'ils fassent, on les verra contraints de le

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<sup>83</sup> Reece (1977), p. 226.

<sup>84</sup> Strecker (1994), pp. 47–52.

<sup>85</sup> Louis de Fourcauld (1853–1914) was an art critic and author of monographs on the artists Roll and Ribot with whom Lalo was acquainted.

reconnaître, et ils salueront *Le Roi d'Ys*, comme dans un autre genre, ils ont salué *Carmen*.<sup>86</sup>

This statement, which proclaims Lalo's work as a flagship of uniquely French musical identity— a view which was to be echoed in the regional reviews in Rennes — nevertheless unwittingly reveals the paradox that emerges from any examination of the opera's roots. When Fourcauld referred to 'actuels' composers, he was unwittingly fuelling the controversy since the composer whose ardent disciple he had been, Richard Wagner, had died in 1883. It was therefore safe to herald a new direction for French music and proclaim the arrival of innovation in such a way that the reputation of the messianic and dominating figure of Wagner remained unchallenged on its pedestal. Lalo's adoption of folk legend as the inspiration for his opera could thus be hailed as the inception of a new genre to be set alongside Bizet's exploitation of a Mediterranean palette.

Recent commentators, however, have remained divided on any evaluation of the extent to which Lalo achieves a definitive and genuine rejection of Wagnerian influence in the opera. Fauquet (1984) explores the inclusion of folkloric material in *Le Roi d'Ys* as a potential antidote to Wagner:

Lalo ait tenté sur ce plan-là aussi d'échapper à l'emprise de l'esthétique et du 'temps' wagnériens. Le modalisme folklorisant de bien des thèmes, l'archaïsme voulu de certaines harmonies agissent en quelque sorte tel un antidote.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> ['Whether they like it or not they'll have to lower their flag! Not one of their own contemporary composers could write a work of such depth and brilliance. Besides, it's French; it could only have come from a Frenchman. Whatever they do they will have to recognize the fact and salute *Le Roi d'Ys* as they once saluted another different work, *Carmen*.']

Lalo, (*Correspondance*, Joël-Marie Fauquet, ed. (1989), Letter no. 269.

<sup>87</sup> Fauquet (1984), p 21.

['Lalo had tried in this way to escape from the ascendancy of the Wagnerian aesthetic (and) atmosphere. The use of modal, folk melody in many of the themes, and the deliberately sought archaism of certain harmonies, act as a kind of antidote.']

Yet, if there was indeed a perceived 'poison' for which it was necessary to provide an anti-venom, Lalo seems to have chosen deliberate exposure to the toxin. In addition to the recollection of the 'Prelude' to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* in the early oboe entry, bars 91–96 of the Overture to *Le Roi* contain a direct quote from 'The Pilgrim's Chorus' from *Tannhäuser*. A satisfactory explanation for these particular five bars, in the absence of a specific reference by Lalo, has occupied the attention of all reviewers of the work. Fauquet, indeed, offers an exhaustive range of possibilities:

'Réminiscence involontaire, hommage reconnaissant, ou nécessaire exorcisme ?'<sup>88</sup>

Lalo, however, seems to have consciously sought a new compositional path that encompassed a personal pilgrimage:<sup>89</sup>

Il faudra dépasser Wagner pour lutter sur son terrain avec avantage et ce lutteur n'est pas encore révélé. – Quant à moi, je me suis rendu compte, à temps, de mon impuissance et j'ai écrit un simple opéra, comme l'indique le titre de ma partition; cette forme, élastique, permet encore d'écrire de la musique sans pasticher les devanciers. [...] En reconstruisant *Le Roi d'Ys*, je me suis servi, avec intention, de formes très brèves : l'avantage que je pressentais, c'était de précipiter l'action dramatique de façon à ne pas lasser l'attention du spectateur : le désavantage, c'est celui que vous signalez, - l'écourtement de la musique.<sup>90</sup>

Huebner has subjected the 'shortening of the music' to detailed scrutiny;<sup>91</sup> however, the forms which Lalo employs to follow his chosen compositional path have particular implications for the transmission of legend and in particular for a legend

<sup>88</sup> ['Unintentional recollection, a grateful tribute, or a necessary exorcism?']

<sup>89</sup> Lalo, *Correspondance*, Joël-Marie Fauquet, ed. (1989), Letter no. 275 to Adolphe Jullien.

<sup>90</sup> ['You have to go beyond Wagner to fight on his home ground to any advantage. This warrior (i.e. with sufficient skill) still has not revealed himself. As far as I was concerned, I recognized my impotence in time and wrote a simple opera as the title on the score demonstrates. This pliable structure allows one to write music that doesn't imitate its precursors. [...] In reconstructing *Le Roi d'Ys*, I deliberately used very short forms: the advantage that I envisaged was the propulsion of the dramatic action in such a way that the attention of the spectator would not be wearied: the disadvantage is the one which you have pointed out — the abbreviation of the music.']

<sup>91</sup> Huebner (1999), pp. 242–251.



which in itself carries specific identity markers relevant both to region and nation.

This abbreviation of the music both strengthens the transmission of the legend and yet at times undermines the impact of the lyrical drama. Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h note that in Celtic legend there can be found 'peu ou pas de psychologie, plutôt des silhouettes que des caractères. Les scénarios évitent toute complication et les définitions à proposer sont parfois lapidaires.'<sup>92</sup>

Concision of musical form — which as a consequence restricts opportunities for the delineation of character — could thus be said to reinforce the retention of the core legend and therefore to have the potential to transmit a doubly-charged assault on Wagnerian influence. Yet, the compression of musical form is sometimes audibly disconcerting and is, moreover, at odds with the strategy of providing additional protagonists in order to spin out the legend for the stage. Additional characters who are not symbolic totems in the manner of the core 'cast' demand a fleshing out if their predicament is to engage the audience. Although Rozenn, through her duets with Mylio and Margared, appears as the antithesis of Margared's aggressive sexuality, when a moment in the opera arises for her character to acquire an extra dimension and depth, the moment is by-passed in the dramatic impulsion. After Mylio has departed for the battle and the king has declared that the victor will gain Rozenn's hand in marriage, she is left, apparently alone, on stage. Musically and dramatically a full-blown aria seems imminent since the contemplative pause is supported by a short orchestral introduction, underpinned by A flat major dominant harmony, followed by a vocal entry which securely emphasizes the tonic. Similarly the phrase itself, which is characterized by the top B flat, seems to indicate the promise of an emotional

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<sup>92</sup> [' little or no psychology, silhouettes rather than (in depth) characters. Dramatic situations avoid complication and suggested interpretation is often limited.']  
Le Roux, and Guyonvarc'h (2000), p. 84.

revelation which will be further developed both musically and psychologically. The seemingly inevitable aria never occurs however, since after a mere six bars, an abrupt modulation to B flat minor, followed by Margared's rhythmic motif, heralds the intrusion of Margared's malign presence. Lalo's declared wish to avoid 'systématiquement tous les développements des thèmes afin de ne jamais ralentir le mouvement de la scène',<sup>93</sup> and thereby to jettison any Wagnerian influence, is clearly in evidence here; both composer and librettist remain faithful to the legend's sparse narrative by sacrificing the opportunity for extended characterization in the interests of dramatic momentum.

The musical score is for Act II, Scene 1. It features two vocal parts: Rozenn (soprano) and Margared (soprano). The piano accompaniment is in the middle staves. The score is in B-flat minor and 3/4 time. The lyrics are in French. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics (e.g., *f*, *p*, *ff*, *ad lib.*). The piano part has a complex, rhythmic accompaniment. The vocal parts have lyrics that are partially obscured by the piano part. The score is a page from a musical score, likely a vocal score or a piano score.

Example 14: Act II, Scene 1. Rozenn's subverted aria (VS, p. 120).

<sup>93</sup> Lalo, *Correspondance*, Fauquet, ed. (1989) Letter 275.

[... systematically (avoid) any thematic development in order not to slow down the dramatic movement.]

Similarly, the end of the opera presents itself as a conflict between Wagnerian pastiche, operatic convention and transmission of myth. In the legend and myth, the ending is ambivalent. Dahut and Ys disappear beneath the waves but achieve supernatural existence; Dahut is destined to re-emerge as a siren and Ys is perpetuated as a mysterious underwater Atlantis whose bells can be heard on stormy nights. The sole living survivors, by grace of divine intervention, are Saint Corentin and King Gradlon. The opera dénouement, however, is precipitated by Margared's transfiguring atonement; she throws herself into the sea in a sacrificial act of suicide, ensuring the survival of the people of Ys and the triumph of good in the form of Mylio and Rozenn. Moreover, the final scene immediately recalls Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, as a comparison of the (French) final stage directions for both operas demonstrates:

Elle se précipite dans la mer. [...] Puis les silhouettes radieuses du Hollandais et de Senta enlacées s'élèvent au-dessus de l'eau et montent en planant. — (*Der fliegende Holländer*).<sup>94</sup>

Elle se jette dans la mer. [...] St Corentin, enveloppé d'un rayon lumineux se dresse devant eux à la place où se trouvait Margared'. — (*Le Roi d'Ys*).<sup>95</sup>

Expiation and supernatural benediction are the defining elements of the endings of both operas; thus Lalo's determined attempt to achieve compositional innovation seems to have been jettisoned in the final act and the assertion of a uniquely French musical aesthetic is obscured. In addition, the bypassing of both the mythical cataclysm and the folkloric resurrection of Dahut as Melusine seem to subvert some of the universal symbolic and allegoric potential of the original myth and to neglect

<sup>94</sup> ['She throws herself into the sea. [...] Then the radiant outlines of the Dutchman and Senta rise entwined above the waters and glide upwards.']

<sup>95</sup> ['She throws herself into the sea. [...] St Corentin, enveloped in shining light, rises above them at the (very) place where Margared had been.']

the elements of the legendary narrative which guaranteed its popular appeal. These manipulations of the source narratives have clear implications for the successful transmission of ethnic identity within the libretto and music.

In addition, if, as Fulcher has demonstrated in her study of French Grand Opera,<sup>96</sup> political and social messages can be transmitted via the libretto, stage design or music of an opera, then, given the nature of a myth or legend and its inbuilt potential for the transmission of universal truths, it seems at least possible that such messages, whether witting or unwitting, could have been present in the dramatic action or symbolism of Lalo's opera in which the relationship between monarch and people is clearly presented as dysfunctional and the king is depicted as the instigator of chaos. The original title of the legend in its myriad versions invariably centres on the fate of the mythical city of Ys. Souvestre<sup>97</sup> entitles the story as 'Keris' and it appears as 'La submersion d'Is' in the *Barsaz Breiz*. The opera, however, places the king firmly at the centre of the drama by using the title *The King of Ys*. In this title, and indeed in the libretto, the king is nameless even though the name of the legendary king Grallon, or Gradlon, was widely known. It would thus seem that the exercise of kingship itself, and the nature of good governance, rather than the depiction of an individual monarch, was uppermost in the minds of Blau and Lalo. Whilst Gradlon/Grallon in the legend abdicates and cedes power to his daughter, an act which demonstrates his failure as a monarch and as a man, the king in the opera similarly makes an error of judgement of Lear-like proportions in arranging the marriage between his daughter Margared and the evil Karnac. Through the abrogation of power, moreover, he invites chaos and the destruction of the kingdom.

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<sup>96</sup> Fulcher (1987), pp. 201–2.

<sup>97</sup> Souvestre (2000), p. 157.

Lalo's music for the king subtly conveys the sin of omission that lies at the heart of the drama. When the king announces the arranged marriage between Margared and Karnac, he does so in a mere twenty bars. After four bars of introduction, the king's vocal entry is sounded above an abrupt modulation where the D flat tonality of the king's last utterance and the introductory bars is displaced. The solemnity is undermined by the temporary harmonic instability which reflects the king's shifting of responsibility. Huebner reads the king's passage here as a prolonged, chromatically-decorated dominant preparation for the choral entry to come and assigns it to Lalo's desire to achieve an anti-Wagnerian concision.<sup>98</sup> This, while acknowledging unusual brevity at yet another point where a prominent aria might be expected, nonetheless fails to acknowledge the symbolism within the music which transmits the king as an exemplar of monarchical failure, an abstraction of misrule.

When the chorus enters with the oath of obedience to the king in Act I, the tonality of D flat major is confirmed, yet as the people swear loyalty, they do so to music which echoes the introduction to the king's abdication. The people are at once more resolute than the king and yet entirely at the mercy of an absolute but failing monarch.

Throughout the opera, they are either the purveyors of whimsical 'soft regionalism' as it emerges through folk or pseudo-folk melody, or else they are presented as an unstable force. Moreover, unquestioning adulation for a legitimate ruler leads the malleable populace into war and propels the Sodom-and-Gomorra-like cataclysm of the threatened final deluge.

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<sup>98</sup> Huebner (1999), p. 249.

It was, moreover, almost inevitable that contemporary concerns about public ethics, legitimate power and sound governance would emerge in the opera. France had passed through an extraordinary time of rapid, complex socio-political changes during the nineteenth century; not only had monarchy and empire been juxtaposed, but at the time of the first draft of *Le Roi*, the Franco Prussian War was still fresh in the collective memory. Lalo had been absent from Paris and in Belgium during the Siege and the Commune in 1871, but had suffered the anxiety of watching events from afar. He wrote: 'J'ai perdu tout sommeil, et ma tête est lourde comme si elle ne contenait que du plomb.'<sup>99</sup> He was, moreover, a committed republican; indeed, Fauquet identifies a conflict of political beliefs as the reason for the failure of Lalo's son Pierre, a monarchist, to preserve or release his father's correspondence.<sup>100</sup> In the chaos of Ys it is thus possible to perceive an acute exploration of the dangers of an absolute monarchy. Although Saint Corentin is present to summon those who threaten the throne to repentance, he fails to avert tragedy in the same manner as in the original legend — the survival of the monarch by virtue of a supernatural intervention to bolster up his divine right to rule does not feature in the libretto narrative.

*Le Roi d'Ys* is, therefore, in the same way as Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*, concerned with the chaos and the destruction of World Order which arise from the failures of absent, inadequate or passive monarchs. Ys is not only governed by the waves of the sea and the tides of war, but is threatened with extinction at the hands of an ageing king, a gullible populace and an unsafe

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<sup>99</sup> ['I cannot sleep at all and my head is as heavy as if it contained nothing but lead.']

Lalo, *Correspondance*, Fauquet, ed. (1989), Letter 58.

<sup>100</sup> Fauquet (1989) 'Introduction' in Lalo, *Correspondance*, p. 16.

succession. Moreover, Lalo's impassioned concern for his home city, Paris, during the Commune, mirrors the socio-political anxieties of the opera and expresses patriotic revulsion in the face of the foreign oppressor, deep suspicion of the masses, despite his republicanism, and sheer terror for the future:

J'ai la haine forcenée des Allemands, ces espions obséquieux qui, comme des laquais écoutaient à toutes nos portes, et comme des laquais trahissaient ceux dont ils mangeaient le pain ; j'ai la haine des 7 millions de Français, naguère les souteneurs de l'aigle de Boulogne, et qui déjà cherchent à le remplacer par un autre oiseau. Seul Paris a droit au respect de tous.<sup>101</sup>

There are clear and obvious parallels between the plight of Paris and the Ys of the opera. In *Le Roi*, Karnac, the enemy prince, has ingratiated himself with king and folk by means of the proposed alliance with Margared. He is a 'listener at doors' and his ultimate act of betrayal demonstrates just how closely he has placed his ear to the keyhole. Similarly, the populace of Ys, like the Frenchmen who are at the receiving end of Lalo's bitter invective, change their allegiance swiftly and are carried towards disaster on a tide of unstable mass opinion.

Yet as convincing as the parallels between Paris and the mythical city are that emerge from libretto and music, there is one intriguing link that unites the city of fable, the national capital, the opera and the text which is the most likely source for the libretto. In the story 'Keris' from *Le Foyer breton*, Souvestre, at the very beginning of the

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<sup>101</sup> ['I am beside myself with hatred for the Germans, these sycophantic spies who listen at all our doors like lackeys and (who) like lackeys betray all those whose bread they have eaten; I am full of hatred for the seven million Frenchmen who once supported the eagle of Boulogne, but who are now attempting to replace it with another bird. Paris alone has the right to respect from everyone.'] Lalo, *Correspondance*, Fauquet, ed. (1989), Letter no. 58 to Jules Armingaud.

narrative which relates the legend of King Grallon and Dahut, makes the following assertion about the legendary city:

Elle (Keris) était si grande et si belle, que pour faire l'éloge de la capitale des galots,<sup>102</sup> les hommes de l'ancien temps n'ont rien trouvé de mieux que de l'appeler *Par-is*, c'est à dire l'égale d'Is.<sup>103</sup>

Yet if this intriguing sentence hints at Lalo's interventionist agenda, his other operas equally confirm the likelihood that a political subtext underpinned *Le Roi*. The dramatic action of *Fiesque*,<sup>104</sup> Lalo's first, 'failed' opera, centred on the republican conspiracy of 1547 in which Count Fiesco plotted against the doges of Genoa;<sup>105</sup> equally, Lalo's final opera, *La jacquerie*,<sup>106</sup> of which only one act was completed, was similarly concerned with the 1358 peasant revolt of the same name.<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, the extent to which audiences perceived the parallels between contemporary political contexts and the dramatic events in *Le Roi* is open to question.

Theodor Adorno, referring to the grand, historical operas of Meyerbeer, has indicated that it is possible to reduce the impact of any ideological content in an opera by transporting it to a purely personal plane.<sup>108</sup> In spite of Lalo's indication that the opera is concerned with fifth-century wars in Brittany, the manipulation of the legend and its presentation as an eternal triangle — the love of two sisters for the same man — would thus seemingly tend to obscure its historical and dependent political import.

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<sup>102</sup> [Non-Breton Frenchmen]

<sup>103</sup> [It (the city of Is) was so vast and so beautiful that when the men of olden times desired to praise the (French) capital, they could find no better name for it than *Par-is*, in other words the 'equal of Is'.] Souvestre (2000), p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> First concert (radio) performance, Montpellier, July 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Lalo's librettist for this opera, Charles Beauquier, also had left-wing tendencies.

<sup>106</sup> First performance, Monte Carlo, 9 March 1895.

<sup>107</sup> The opera was posthumously completed by Arthur Coquard.

<sup>108</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Klangfiguren: Musikalische Schriften I*. (Berlin: 1959). Quoted in André Spies, *French Opera During the Belle Époque: A Study in the Social History of Ideas* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1986), p. 4.



However, because the legend of Ys, by its intrinsic nature, transmits universal truths and symbols, there will always remain an element of its content that evades the purely personal. The plight of the people and city of Ys, the downward spiral through war and chaos, represents an entirely human fate which has been reiterated throughout time. Indeed, in 1887, the year before the opera's première Zola's fifteenth novel in the Rougon-Macquart series, *La Terre*, had been published. In this grim realist work, the earth-cycles of life and death and plenty and famine are scrutinised in the light of themes which are common to *Le Roi*, such as the lust for land ownership, rightful inheritance, shared genetics, ambivalent or inadequate father figures and filial disobedience. The entire novel hinges on the metaphorical 'abdication' of a father, Père Fouan, and his catastrophic decision to share out his patrimony whilst still alive and active; the decision is instrumental in bringing about family breakdown and a sordid cycle of rape and murder ensues.<sup>109</sup>

Zola's most graphic and sexually explicit novel, and its ensuing notoriety, which subverted any concept of the countryside as an idyllic locus of pastoral calm, equally had the potential to obscure the opera's political subtext since it presented similar core themes as cyclical and omnipresent issues rather than as archaic events with possible relevance for contemporary political contexts. According to Zola: 'La terre n'entre pas dans nos querelles d'insectes rageurs, elle ne s'occupe pas plus de nous que des fourmis, la grande travailleuse, éternellement à sa besogne.'<sup>110</sup> This parallel realist agenda, which both diminished the significance of distant territorial struggles and yet rendered them wholly personal, was equally capable of derailing the political

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<sup>109</sup> Émile Zola (1887) *La Terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

<sup>110</sup> ['The earth is not part of the quarrels of our frantic insect-like existence; she, the great worker, eternally at her task, is no more bothered with us than with the ants.']  
Ibid., p. 552

impact of *Le Roi* because it presented men as helpless puppets, rather than as activists, in the shaping of historical events.

Yet, as that time of turmoil passed to be replaced by the years of peace, prosperity and gaiety that came to be known as the Belle Époque, insertion of the opera into the cultural life of the nation was assured. Not only was the dilution of the ideological or political subtexts potentially achieved by the passing of time and the consequent diminution of relevance, but, as Spies has noted, shifts occurred in the actual cultural politics of the Third Republic: 'Generally speaking, critics and public alike consistently failed to remark any ideological implications of the operas presented to them. Third Republic governments never took advantage of any capacity the opera might have had for the propagation of ideology'.<sup>111</sup>

Viewed from the distant region whose legend had been hijacked, the opera thus presented an equivocal aesthetic message. Its musical identity had been forged from the need to secure a national identity for French music and thus served aesthetic drives focused on the unified nation. It used a story which had initiated interest in the region and which would ultimately become a core text for those ethnic nationalists who would promote 'hard' regionalism; at the same time, it used as its source a print-version of the text which had been translated into the language of centralized power and potentially propagated an ideology of relevance to the central power base, the capital. Quite simply, then, from a regional standpoint, the opera was born of Paris and could only be received at the time of its provincial debut in the same way as any other work emanating from the capital. The criteria which determined its reception

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<sup>111</sup> Spies (1986), p. 4.

were its success and the longevity of that success at central level. Moreover, whilst Breton regionalism evolved and oscillated between those strands which Strecker has conveniently designated as 'hard' and 'soft',<sup>112</sup> the opera also failed to deploy sufficiently 'soft' aesthetic markers, since stage design omitted the regional in favour of the mediaeval. The ambivalent nature of the manner in which regional symbolism is deployed within the work clearly continues to obscure its ethnic identity to this day, as its reception history within Brittany testifies.

Lalo, therefore, deployed Breton regional markers in a way which built significantly on Meyerbeer's more flamboyant, but less politically directed, *couleur locale* in *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*, even though his manipulation of a culturally significant legend arguably compromised its impact. Ironically, the paradox which *Le Roi* encapsulates can best be demonstrated by another painting by the artist whose *La Fuite du Roi Giradlon* (1884) may have inspired Lalo to revise the early version of the opera. The artist, Luminais, is perhaps best known for his painting *La Veuve du pêcheur* (*The Fisherman's Widow*) in which the Breton landscape is again prominent. In the scene depicted, the grieving widow of a recently drowned fisherman is helped away from the Breton shoreline by her eldest daughter while two younger siblings follow. The harsh reality of Breton life thus dominates the canvas, for the full destructive force of the Atlantic and its impact on the life of the indigenous population is central to the narrative of the painting. In using a legend which was of the people and woven into the cultural fabric of the life of the region, and in adapting the ending so that an act of expiation is projected as a conclusive panacea to the wrath of the waves, Lalo and Blau, diverted significantly from the reality which lay at the heart of the myth.

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<sup>112</sup> Strecker (1994), pp. 47–52

Whereas Luminais' paintings remain true both to the universal and regional symbolism in which the sea stands for elemental untamed force, chaos and mortality — a symbolism which later Breton operas were to exploit to the full — Lalo's *Le Roi*, through music, libretto and stage design, transmitted an equivocal regional identity which obscured the essential subtext of meaning. Significantly, however, the music which promotes the universal core of the deluge myth, and retains the regional markers within the legend, provides the most dramatically convincing and attractive material within the opera.



4 : Évariste-Vital Luminais, 1865, *La Veuve du pêcheur*, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

## The Lament of the Exile

### *Le Pays*

Nancy, 1912.

#### La Bretagne

Un pays nostalgique où croît la Fleur du Rêve !  
Un sol troué de rocs, tel un pauvre en lambeaux,  
Et des oiseaux de deuil, goélands ou corbeaux,  
Qui vont en tournoyant s'abattre sur la grève.

De vastes horizons, sous un ciel gris et bas ;  
Des landes et des bois qui sont couleur d'automne.  
Le vent se lève et court sur la mer qui moutonne ;  
Des barques partiront qui ne reviendront pas !<sup>1</sup>

When the Breton poet Hippolyte Durand offered the poem 'La Bretagne' for publication in *Le Parnasse breton contemporain* he could not have foreseen that his evocation of nostalgia linked to ethnic rooting and geographical belonging would later find a direct counterpart in the only mature opera of his youthful editor, the Breton writer and composer, Joseph-Guy Ropartz.<sup>2</sup> In that work, *Le Pays*, the vision of a beloved landscape, perceived from the psychological distance and physical separation of exile, is used not merely to construct a partly-real, partly-dream country that serves as a perpetual inspiration, but also acts as a poignant reinforcement of

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<sup>1</sup> ['A nostalgic land where the Flower of Dream grows!  
A rock-strewn ground, like a pauper in rags,  
And mourning birds, seagulls and crows,  
Who wheel around and swoop on the shore.

Vast horizons, under a low grey sky;  
Moors and woods which are autumn-tinted.  
The wind whips up and races across the white horses of the sea;  
Boats will leave which will not return!']

Hippolyte Durand, 'La Bretagne', *Le Parnasse breton contemporain* (1889), p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph-Guy Ropartz (1864–1955). An early one act opera, *Le diable couturier: Légende Bretonne*, with a libretto by Louis Tiercelin, was completed in 1888 and first performed in Boulogne-sur-mer on 3 July 1890.

identity in maturity measured by its distance from youth. Ropartz's opera explores the social and psychological dilemmas of exile through the experiences of the male protagonist, the fisherman Tual, and confronts the realization that destructive separation anxiety can, paradoxically, raise the individual to heroic stature and function as a motor of creativity.

By the time that Ropartz began work on *Le Pays*, in 1908, Breton regional politics had evolved significantly. The *Barzaz Breiz* controversy had dissipated<sup>3</sup> and the folklore, which it had assiduously promoted, was emerging as one of the accepted references for 'hard regionalism' and separatist nationalism. In the years that preceded the First World War, nascent Breton ethnic identity, secure in an established folk-history, turned towards a more realistic assessment of the region's socio-political status and current, symbolic cultural values; this evaluation of actual regional attributes coincided with distinct moves towards the development of creative diversity to ensure the continued revivification of the artistic life of the province.

Ropartz was possessed of a unique inheritance with which to extend this exploration of realistic, regional cultural values into the realms of musical *véritisme*. His ethnic credentials were beyond question since he was a native of the province: the family manor was in Lanloup, he was born at Guingamp in 1864 and his early education was undertaken in Brittany until his departure for Paris and the Conservatoire.<sup>4</sup> He was, moreover, primed for a role in the promotion of regional identity by his father, Sigismond, who, as a noted lawyer and Breton intellectual, was at the forefront of the movement to promote the arts within the province and to assert the cultural credibility

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> He was educated at Vannes, Rennes and Angers.

of the region.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Sigismond Ropartz was a significant participant in the first *Congrès celtique* on French soil in October 1867<sup>6</sup> and provided the French lyrics to a cantata entitled *Les Deux Bretagnes* which perpetuated the notion of a link between Welsh and Breton bards that La Villemarqué, the author of the *Barzaz Breiz*, had been so keen to establish.<sup>7</sup> However, Sigismond envisaged not merely the re-evaluation of Breton cultural values, but also advocated a future in which cultural identity would cease to be statically enshrined in a hallowed past. At the 1876 *Congrès*, he made a plea for the inclusion of music as a category within the *Association Bretonne* and indicated that it should aim to ‘faire connaître à chaque Congrès et les vieilles œuvres populaires bretonnes si naïves, si originales, et les œuvres des compositeurs bretons modernes.’<sup>8</sup>

Whilst acknowledging the contribution of a bygone musical heritage, Ropartz senior was nevertheless at pains to indicate that the *Association* should offer to aspiring creative artists:

La collaboration de poètes et de lettrés avec les compositeurs, la possibilité d’exécuter devant une réunion sympathique et choisie une œuvre sérieuse et longuement travaillée, la publicité et la longévité efficace et réelle donnée par la gravure.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sigismond Ropartz (1823–1878).

P Thielemans, *Les Deux Bretagnes* (Rennes: Oberthur et Fils, 1868). The cantata also had Breton lyrics, *Ann diou Vreiz*, provided by Le Jean.

<sup>6</sup> Also present at the Congrès of 1867 were the elite of the Breton Renaissance Movement.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> [‘to bring both the old popular Breton works, so unsophisticated and original, and the works of modern Breton composers, to the attention of every Congrès’]

Cited in Marie-Claire Le Moigne-Mussat, *Musique et Société à Rennes aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècles* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1988), p. 362.

<sup>9</sup> [‘The collaboration between poets and men of learning with composers, the possibility of performing a serious, lengthily-wrought work before a sympathetic gathering, publicity and the effective, real survival (of the work) brought about by publication.’]

Ibid., p. 362



This stance, which envisaged regional cultural identity as progressive and evolving, rather than as fossilized, was a notable landmark in the Breton movement and significantly informed the psychological patrimony of Sigismond's son, the composer Joseph-Guy Ropartz. The opera, *Le Pays*, which dates from the composer's middle years, follows this trend precisely since the libretto is based on the novella 'L'Islandaise'<sup>10</sup> by Charles Le Goffic.<sup>11</sup> The story was published shortly before the conception of the opera and takes as its subject contemporary Breton fishing practice and the concomitant social evils within the northern ports of the province.<sup>12</sup> However, resonant though the subject undoubtedly was, elements within the original story, the libretto and Ropartz's musical treatment of the subject, are firmly rooted in former regional and musical traditions.

Indeed, the social background to Le Goffic's novella, the plight of Breton fishermen forced by economic necessity to ply their trade in Icelandic waters during the months from February to August, had already entered regional folklore and possessed all the attributes of a modern myth. The first fishing smack bound from the port of Paimpol for Iceland in pursuit of cod left Brittany in 1852.<sup>13</sup> Ten years later, there were eighty registered Breton vessels involved in the industry and the fishermen who sailed the boats had acquired a reputation for alcoholism, promiscuity and daring.<sup>14</sup>

L'opinion publique, influencée par les images de virilité factice colportée par la chanson et une certaine littérature, ne perçoit pas la gravité de la situation; complaisante pour l'ivrognerie, elle accepte le cliché de

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<sup>10</sup> ['The Icelandic Girl']

<sup>11</sup> Charles Le Goffic (1863–1932).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Le Goffic, 'L'Islandaise' in *Passions Celles* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1908).

<sup>13</sup> Lanloup and Guingamp, where Ropartz grew up, are close to Paimpol; it is inevitable that he would have had first-hand knowledge of the fishing fleet.

<sup>14</sup> The industry lasted until 1935 when the last two fishing smacks finally left Paimpol.

l'homme viril, dur à la douleur et au labeur, grand buveur (il le faut bien pour 'tenir') et amoureux de la mer.<sup>15</sup>

The legendary status achieved by the fishermen owed as much to the dangers they encountered in the course of their Icelandic tours as to their exploits on dry land; the mortality rate was high — in the years between 1852 and 1935, a hundred and twenty vessels were lost without trace and at least two thousand sailors are known to have perished.<sup>16</sup> In direct contrast to the sailors who conformed to a patriarchal masculine ideal, the women who waited on cliffs and quaysides for the annual return of fathers, husbands, sons and lovers presented an image of faithful endurance that, in its turn, reinforced conventional feminine gender-role norms. To these ingredients in the saga was added the attraction of the exotic in the form of the sailors' destination, a mist-shrouded Iceland, which functioned in binary opposition to the lure of home and the nostalgic pull of the familiar Breton customs and landscape for which the 'exiled' sailor longed.

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<sup>15</sup> ['Public opinion, influenced by the false images of virility transmitted by songs and a certain type of literature, did not grasp the seriousness of the situation; turning a blind eye to drunkenness, it accepted the cliché of the he-man, tough in the face of grief and physical work, a hard drinker (you had to be to survive) and in love with the sea.']

Dominique Besançon, 'Préface' in Anatole Le Braz (1897), *Pâques d'Islande* (Rennes: Terre de Brume, 2001), p 8.

<sup>16</sup> 'Paimpol', [www.bretagnenet.com](http://www.bretagnenet.com) (Accessed 10 September, 2009). These figures relate specifically to the Breton town of Paimpol. Mortality was high because the practice was to take the fishing smacks in close to the reefs, thus risking the loss of the entire crew of around twenty five men. In contrast, fishermen from St. Malo and other ports made use of smaller boats launched from the parent vessel.



5: A plaque from the *Mur des disparus* (The wall of the disappeared) which commemorates drowned fishing crews and their boats in the Cimetière de Ploubazlanec, nr.Paimpol.

Although the lives of the Breton *islandais* (Icelanders) were brutal and short, oral tradition elevated their stories to the stature of the heroic ballads which had characterized earlier Breton folk literature. The narratives dealt with the universal themes of struggle for survival, human passion, life and death, and were seasoned with the dual elements that distinguish Breton folklore — the pervasive workings of the supernatural and the overwhelming omnipresence of the traditional enemy, the sea. Indeed, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the everyday saga of Breton fishing-folk had inspired a plethora of fictional works and popular songs. The quality

of these was variable and lesser works emphasized superficial glamour but failed to provide any profundity of characterization or to confront relevant social or cultural evils. *La Paimpolaise*, by the so-called 'Breton Bard', Théodore Botrel, is an example of the genre which displays the usual folkloric elements; here the young sailor, about to be claimed by the ocean, recalls his erstwhile lover and his native land:<sup>17</sup>

Puis, quand la vague le désigne,  
L'appelant de sa grosse voix,  
Le brave islandais se résigne  
En faisant un signe de croix —  
Et le pauvre gars  
Quand vient le trépas,  
Serrant la médaille qu'il baise,  
Glisse dans l'océan sans fond  
En songeant à la Paimpolaise  
Qui l'attend au pays breton !<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the fate of the Breton cod fishermen received extended treatment in three works of fiction closely connected to Joseph-Guy Ropartz and *Le Pays*. In addition to Le Goffic's 'L'Islandaise', two other significant novels, Pierre Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande* (Icelandic Fisherman), and Anatole Le Braz's *Pâques d'Islande* (Easter in Iceland), both used the legendary Paimpol sailors as source material;<sup>19</sup> however all three works exposed, albeit to varying extents, the social ills connected to the industry and freely combined myth and the supernatural with social realism to

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<sup>17</sup> Théodore Botrel, *La Paimpolaise* (Fortin, 1899). Music by Eugène Feautrier.

<sup>18</sup> ['Then when the wave marks him out,  
Calling him in a loud voice,  
The brave Icclander makes ready for death  
Making the sign of the cross –  
And when the poor lad's end is near  
Clutching the medallion that he is kissing,  
He slides into the bottomless ocean  
Dreaming of the girl from Paimpol  
Who waits for him in his Breton homeland.']

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Loti, *Pêcheur d'Islande* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1886).  
Anatole Le Braz, *Pâques d'Islande* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1897).

provide a powerful cultural commentary.<sup>20</sup> Although the libretto of *Le Pays* is directly drawn from Le Goffic's novella and Le Braz's novel may have appealed to Ropartz because the narrative dealt with the death at sea of a beloved brother,<sup>21</sup> the influence of Loti's story is also often reflected in the opera.

The dramatization of Loti's novel, *Pêcheur d'Islande*, marked a significant turning point in the life of Ropartz. Like his father before him, Ropartz was prominent in the Breton literary movement and was a close colleague of the writer and poet Louis Tiercelin.<sup>22</sup> He was associated with Tiercelin in the production and publication of *Le Parnasse breton contemporain*,<sup>23</sup> the collection of poetry to which eighty nine regional poets contributed; later the two friends were responsible for *I. Hermine*, a Breton literary and artistic review.<sup>24</sup> Tiercelin had solicited Loti for the chance to dramatize *Pêcheur d'Islande* for the theatre with the intention that his colleague Ropartz would provide the incidental stage music; however, disagreement between Loti and Tiercelin resulted in a protracted quarrel which left Ropartz as the sole beneficiary of the relationship.<sup>25</sup> Ropartz's incidental music for the stage version was completed in 1891.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pierre Loti (Julien Viaud) also wrote *Mon Frère Yves* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1883). This novel similarly deals with Breton sailors and with their drunkenness and promiscuity.

<sup>21</sup> Ropartz's elder brother, Yves-Guillaume-Marie, who was a major influence on his poetic output, died in 1881.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Tiercelin (1849–1915).

<sup>23</sup> Joseph-Guy Ropartz and Louis Tiercelin, eds., *Le Parnasse breton contemporain* (1889). Le Goffic and Le Braz were among the contributors.

<sup>24</sup> *I. Hermine* (Rennes: 1889–1911).

<sup>25</sup> The quarrel was publicly aired at some length since Tiercelin used the publication *I. Hermine* to inveigh against Loti at regular intervals. Le Moigne-Mussat (1988), p. 371.

<sup>26</sup> Loti had never met Ropartz at the time of the break with Tiercelin and was forced to send two emissaries to Ropartz for a preliminary investigation of the music. The Swiss critic, William Ritter, and Prince Karageorgevitch subsequently approved the score (played at the piano on four hands) and Loti himself insisted that the music should be used in its entirety for the stage version of the story, even though the director of the Grand Théâtre, Paris, was dubious about the length (the work consisted of twenty numbers).

*Ibid.*, p. 371

The fisherman who provides the title for Loti's book is Yann, a protagonist who fulfils all the requirements of the contemporary myth; he is strong, handsome, a seasoned sailor on the Icelandic circuit and a successful, but promiscuous lover. In the opening scene of the novel, questioned by the other sailors about his failure to marry, he declares 'Mes noces à moi, je les fais à la nuit; d'autres fois, je les fais à l'heure; c'est suivant'.<sup>27</sup> This is followed by a description of his latest tawdry conquest which is 'conté avec de mots rudes et des images à lui.'<sup>28</sup> Viewed from the standpoint of modern gender politics, his heroic potential seems to be minimal — even the ship's dog is not exempt from his casual cruelty — and there is a strong element of violence in his psychological make-up.

Il avait le cœur bon, ce Yann, mais sa nature était restée un peu sauvage, et quand son être physique était seul en jeu, une caresse douce était souvent chez lui très près d'une violence brutale'.<sup>29</sup>

Yann, however, retains elements of the stock fictional hero; the violence in his nature reflects the savage environments in which he habitually functions, the Icelandic fishing grounds, and, intermittently, the untamed Breton landscape. He is, in spite of his provincial setting, the archetypal Romantic protagonist who demonstrates 'subjectivity bordering on solipsism, often coupled with a morbid desire that the self be lost in nature's various infinities.'<sup>30</sup> His heroic potential becomes apparent with the contrasting appearance of the heroine Gaud. She represents chaste, faithful love,

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<sup>27</sup> ['I have my own 'wedding celebrations' at night, at other times I have them when the fancy takes me; it depends ']

Pierre Loti, *Pêcheur d'Islande* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> ['Told with crude words and illustrated accordingly ']

Ibid., p. 27

<sup>29</sup> ['This Yann had a good heart, but his nature had remained a little wild and when his physical persona was in operation, a gentle caress was very close to a brutal, violent reaction. ']

Ibid., p. 32

<sup>30</sup> J. L. Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion, 1990), p.

submission to patriarchal control and the embodiment of the nineteenth-century ideal of the 'household nun'; with her entrance, the reader is alerted to the possibility that redemption for Yann is possible and that, in spite of the setting, a conventional love story is being played out.

Loti, who was himself a sailor and whose early novels had centred on the orient, was at pains in *Pêcheur d'Islande* to exploit the quaint and folkloric aspects of regional life; the exploration of the oriental, exotic 'other' which marked his early works was thus transmuted into an interrogation of the 'familiar exotic'. The third chapter of the novel, in which Gaud and her grandmother are introduced, is saturated with references to the Breton *coiffe* and local costume:

Sa coiffe était en forme de coquille, descendait bas sur le front, s'y appliquant presque comme un bandeau, puis se relevant beaucoup des deux côtés, laissant voir d'épaisses nattes de cheveux roulés en colimaçon au-dessus des oreilles — coiffure conservées des temps très anciens et qui donne encore un air d'autrefois aux femmes paimpolaises.<sup>31</sup>

The association between the female protagonist and her ethnic origins is a device that is continually asserted throughout the narrative; Gaud therefore comes to represent not merely the feminine-gendered space of home and hearth, but also the Breton countryside which, along with the Icelandic Sea, replaces the exotic landscape of Loti's earlier output. The combination, moreover, of archetypal, patriarchal values of feminine submission, loyalty in the face of rejection and redemptive purity, allied with the mystery of the exotic transmitted through the description of wild and distant landscapes, presented a heroine with undoubted appeal for central hegemony. Ropartz

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<sup>31</sup> ['Her head-dress was shell-shaped and was low on her forehead, to which it fitted like a band, rising on each side, to reveal thick braids in snail coils under the ears — a hairstyle which has survived from ancient times and which still gives an old-fashioned look to the ladies of Paimpol.']  
Loti (1996), p. 38

was ultimately to name his first child Gaud, thus reinforcing the conflation of cherished femininity with a distant and beloved native land and unwittingly demonstrating the extensive, personal significance of the saga of the *islandais* which would later emerge in changes to the original source of the opera libretto.<sup>32</sup>

Yet if Gaud symbolizes the domestic refuge, the landmass and safe haven to which the fishing smacks return as the cod-fishing season ends, and to which the thoughts of the longing sailor are eternally drawn, Yann is indisputably linked to the uncontrolled force of the ocean. Issues of gender and the depiction of otherness within the novel are, moreover, directly related to social and cultural economic patterns based on conflict between the financial and emotional exigencies of hearth and home and masculine, maritime toil with its concomitant dangers and sacrifices. The opposing conflation of the hero with the destructive forces of the elements, and with the sea in particular, allows the novelist not merely to polarize the contrast between genders, but also to explore the psychological complexities of masculine identity allied to gruelling physical labour.

This relationship which binds man to toil and challenge is ultimately shown in *Pêcheur d'Islande* to transcend normal relationships between genders. In a final ironic dénouement, Yann, who has finally courted and married Gaud, returns to sea for the Icelandic fishing season. There he meets his end; yet what transforms the tragic climax to a conventional love story is the final death scene in which erotic love is displaced from the feminine 'other' onto the ocean:

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<sup>32</sup> Gaud Ropartz (*b.* 15 February 1893).



Une nuit [...] avaient été célébrées ses noces avec la mer. Avec la mer, qui autrefois avait été sa nourrice : c'était elle qui l'avait bercé, qui l'avait fait adolescent large et fort — et ensuite elle l'avait repris dans sa virilité superbe, pour elle seule. Un profond mystère avait enveloppé ces noces monstrueuses. Tout le temps, des voiles obscurs s'étaient agités au-dessus, des rideaux mouvants et tourmentés, tendus pour cacher la fête ; et la fiancée donnait de la voix, faisait toujours son plus grand bruit horrible pour étouffer les cris. Lui, [...] s'était défendu [...] contre cette épouse de tombeau. Jusqu'au moment où il s'était abandonné, les bras ouverts pour la recevoir, avec un grand cri profond comme un taureau qui râle, la bouche déjà emplie d'eau ; les bras ouverts, étendus et raidis pour jamais.<sup>33</sup>

This allegorical transference of feminine identity to the elemental force of the sea and water and the displacement of the erotically sought 'other' to an area of human endeavour characterized by masculine toil are the essence of Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande* and of the novella on which the libretto of *Le Pays* and the music of the opera are directly based.

Le Goffic's 'L'Islandaise' is, in many ways, a mirror image of the Loti novel for which Ropartz had already provided the incidental music. The hero Tual is a Breton fisherman who is the sole survivor of a shipwrecked Breton vessel; stranded in Iceland he falls in love with Kaethe, an Icelandic girl and undergoes a form of marriage with her. The union, sanctified by an oath sworn on the shore of the mysterious bog Hrafuaga, is destined to be short-lived, since Tual, overcome by

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<sup>33</sup>['One night, his conjugal union with the sea had been celebrated. With the sea which had once been his nursemaid, it was she who had rocked him and made him into (such a) broad, strong adolescent — and then had taken him back for herself alone in all his superb manhood. Deep mystery had shrouded these monstrous nuptials. Dark veils always swirled above, storm-twisted drapes (were) held out to hide the celebrations; and the bride gave tongue and made her most horrible noise in order to stifle the cries --- He defended himself against this bride of the tomb. Until the very moment when he abandoned himself, his arms open to receive her, with a loud, deep cry like the bellowing of a bull, his mouth already filled with water; his arms stretched out and stiffened for all time.']  
Ibid , p 239

longing for lost comrades and homeland, deserts the pregnant girl, only to perish in the depths of the mere.

Le Goffic's hero Tual and Loti's Yann seem to represent not only archetypal Breton fishermen but also two complementary halves of a coherent whole. Both possess fiancées whom they jettison in the manner of unwanted cargo once their boats leave port, and both are directed by a displacement of erotic longings which transcend normal, human, social contacts; they are both, nevertheless, inexorably drawn to the homeland which has given them birth. The account of Tual, stranded in Iceland, seems to complete the shadowy picture of Yann's own earlier life at sea; since the two sailors share many of the moral traits pertaining to the modern myth of the *islandais*, their stories map conveniently onto each other and their characters appear interchangeable.

The 'mirror image' which links the earlier work for which Ropartz had provided stage music and the libretto source for his later opera *Le Pays* is intensified by the two respective female protagonists. Kaethe, the Icelandic girl symbolically represents hearth, home and faithful love; she is 'passive et douce' and 'semblait n'avoir d'autre volonté que celle de son hôte'.<sup>34</sup> Her ethnic costume is as essential to the narrative as the descriptions of Gaud's coiffe are to the effect of Loti's novel; she is thus described as:

Vêtue de son plus beau *vadmel* à galons de velours et coiffée de son *faldr* des jours de fête, qui est une sorte de hennin recourbé à son extrémité comme une proue de gondole. En semaine, elle portait une jupe et un corsage de grosse laine qui s'agrafait par devant et sa coiffure était une

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<sup>34</sup> [ 'Passive and gentle and seemed to have no other will than that of her guest. ' ]

petite calote plate de drap noir dont la houppe passait dans un coulant de métal et battait tantôt l'une, tantôt l'autre épaule.<sup>35</sup>

Yet if the story, 'L'Islandaise', by Le Goffic might seem to be a coincidental inversion of Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande*, subtle manipulations of the original tale, which were introduced when it was transformed into the libretto for *Le Pays*, reinforce the impression of *déjà-vu*. Such manipulations were surely intentional. Charles Le Goffic and Ropartz were acquainted, since Le Goffic was one of the Breton poets whose work Tiercelin and Ropartz had deemed worthy of inclusion in *Le Parnasse breton contemporain*. Indeed, Le Goffic's contribution to the work is significant; it provides not merely the evidence of a longstanding working relationship with Ropartz himself, but also demonstrates close links between his own œuvre and that of Loti.

Six of his poems are reproduced in the volume; one of these, 'Bouquet', refers directly to the town of Paimpol and another, 'Bretonne de Paris', which describes a Breton girl transplanted from her homeland to the capital, appears to echo the section of narrative in Loti's novel which describes the heroine Gaud during a stay in Paris.<sup>36</sup>

Le Goffic's poem begins:

Hélas ! tu n'es plus une paysanne;  
Le mal des cités a pâli ton front.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>['Dressed in her most beautiful velvet-braided *vadmel* and with her holiday *fakdr* a headdress which is a sort of bonnet bent over at the point like the prow of a gondola. On weekdays, she wore a skirt and bodice of coarse wool which fastened at the front and her headdress was a little, flat, cloth cap whose tassel passed through a metal loop and knocked against first one then the other shoulder.']  
Le Goffic (1908), p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> The six poems by Le Goffic included in *Le Parnasse breton contemporain* (1889) are 'Vos Yeux', 'Confidence', 'Bouquet', 'Les Peupliers', 'Bretonne de Paris' and 'Premiers doutes', pp. 142-7.

<sup>37</sup> ['Alas! You are no longer a country girl,  
Town sickness has made your forehead pale.']

In the ensuing verses, the poet asserts the indefinable Breton qualities which are retained by his beloved even when she is transported beyond the boundaries of her homeland. Similarly, Loti says of Gaud:

Alors, de petite Gaud, elle était devenue une *mademoiselle Marguerite*,<sup>38</sup> grande, sérieuse, au regard grave. [...] Dans ces grandes villes, son costume s'était modifié plus qu'elle-même. [...] Mais une dignité innée, excessive, lui avait servi de sauvegarde.<sup>39</sup>

The changes made to Le Goffic's 'L'Islandaise' in the opera libretto reinforce the sense of literary incest which links those novelists who promoted the contemporary Breton myth of the Icelandic fishermen. In the original story, Tual is betrothed to a Breton girl, Françoise Lhostis, whose photograph he manages to retrieve from the wreck and conceal.<sup>40</sup> It is the discovery of the image of the distant fiancée which alerts Kaethe to the decline of her own relationship with Tual and her failure to bind him to a new homeland. Ironically, the fiancée who symbolically represents the Breton mainland within the novella and who resembles, therefore, Loti's heroine Gaud, is omitted in the opera. In Act I, Tual dismisses all suggestion of a prior relationship which would prevent a union with Kaethe: 'Ma femme, si j'en avais une, ne resterait pas longtemps veuve, et ma promise se marierait avec un autre'.<sup>41</sup> Michel Fleury comments on the narrative potential of the 'lost' fiancée excluded from the libretto:

Le Goffic a inexplicablement supprimé l'épisode du portrait de Françoise Lhostis, la fiancée de Tual à Kerfot. Ce portrait jouait le rôle de catalyseur ; il déterminait la nostalgie du Breton et il confirmait les

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<sup>38</sup> The name 'Marguerite' is the French equivalent of the Breton name 'Gaud'.

<sup>39</sup> ['So little Gaud had become Miss Marguerite, tall serious and with a grave outlook [...] In these large towns, her dress had changed more than she had. [...] but an excessive, inner dignity had preserved her (best qualities and ethnic identity)'.]

Ibid., p. 39

<sup>40</sup> Le Goffic (1908), pp. 30-1.

<sup>41</sup> ['My wife, if I had one, would not stay a widow for long, and my betrothed would marry another.']

soupçons de Kaethe. Surtout, l'existence d'une fiancée au pays expliquait qu'à aucun moment Tual ne propose à Kaethe de le suivre en Bretagne.<sup>42</sup>

However, the omission of the feminine 'other' who stands for native land is significant and ceases to be inexplicable when considered in the light of the network of sources which informed the libretto and of the circumstances which surrounded its production. Ropartz's personal literary expertise, evident in his early poetry and literary criticism, had certainly endowed him with the necessary experience to produce his own libretto; nevertheless, his rejection of a synthesis of the arts at this point provoked surprise and even disapproval from Albéric Magnard, his long-time friend:

C'est avec le plus vif plaisir que je vous vois vous remettre au théâtre, et avec le plus vif déplaisir que je vous vois, doué comme vous l'êtes, renoncer à développer vous-même votre poème. Ce n'est vraiment pas la peine d'avoir écrit d'excellentes poésies.<sup>43</sup>

Ropartz, however, had retained the services of Le Goffic, the creator of the original literary source, for that purpose but exercised strict control over the libretto. Since, then, a great proportion of the novella text is retained, the exclusion of Françoise Lhostis from the narrative provides a clear indication of Ropartz's intention to use *Le Pays* as a vehicle for regional and ethnic markers of a specific and intensely personal kind. For in the opera, the lingering affection of the hero for his erstwhile beloved, which articulates the Le Goffic tale, is replaced by the abiding and indestructible love of the male protagonist, Tual, for his native land. Kaethe in 'L'Islandaise' fears an

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<sup>42</sup> ['Le Goffic inexplicably suppressed the incident of the portrait of Françoise Lhostis, Tual's fiancée in Kerfot. The portrait acted as a catalyst in the novel, it gave a focus to the Breton's nostalgia and confirmed Kaethe's suspicions. Most importantly, the existence of a fiancée at home explained why Tual never asks Kaethe to follow him back to Brittany.']

Michel Fleury, 'Le Chant de l'Exil' in notes accompanying CD, Timpani, 3 377892 320651.

<sup>43</sup> ['It is with the greatest pleasure that I see you are back in the theatre again and with the greatest displeasure that I see that, gifted as you are, you have given up on the idea of writing your own libretto. It would not have been hard (for you) to have written some excellent verse.']

Albéric Magnard (1907) Letter to J. G. Ropartz (Fonds. Ropartz, BnF. Mus.)

actual flesh-and-blood rival; however, Kaethe in the opera, addressing Tual, recognizes an invisible enemy: 'Tu es notre hôte jusqu'au printemps prochain. Tu m'aimeras peut-être jusque-là ; mais quand tu reverras les goëlettes de ton pays, tu n'auras pas la force de rester avec nous. Tu t'en iras.'<sup>44</sup> The whole work thus functions as an extended exploration of the nature and condition of exile which reflects Ropartz's own artistic intents and psychological needs.

At the time of the conception of *Le Pays*, Ropartz was well placed to evaluate the psychological implications of separation from the homeland. His Breton upbringing, training in the law and literary pursuits were followed by studies at the Paris Conservatoire under the tutelage of Franck and Massenet; the Paris sojourn<sup>45</sup> then led to travel and professional appointments which kept him from Brittany, with the exception of holidays, for the greater part of his adult working life. Le Goffic's 'L'Islandaise', to which was introduced in 1908, would, then, have resonated as an acute expression of deracination, nostalgia and longing for home.

France had not experienced the marked rural exodus and the associated changes in infrastructure and communication systems that characterized the process of industrialization in Britain and Brittany was slower than the nation as a whole in demonstrating the social mobility reflected in urban re-settlement. Nevertheless, the years that separate Meyerbeer's *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* (1859) and Ropartz's *Le Pays* (1912) are years in which a steady decline in the rural population took place — the

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<sup>44</sup> ['You are our guest until next spring. You will love me, perhaps, until then, but when you see the fishing boats from your country, you won't have the strength to stay with us. You will leave.']

<sup>45</sup> Ropartz was based in Paris from 1888–1894. From 1894–1919, he directed the Conservatoire de Nancy. See Enyss Djemil, *J. Guy Ropartz ou la recherche d'une vocation* (Le Mans : Jean Vilaire, 1967), p. 286.

percentage of the overall population of France dwelling in cities or towns rose by 16% during that period.

Within Brittany, settlement patterns also altered, so that demographic studies of the same period show a smaller population shift (7%) towards the town; this was, however, a shift which also accounted for mobility from interior rural settlements to the coast.<sup>46</sup> Demographic and economic change in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were thus increasingly responsible for physical and psychological displacement, and the plight of the exile was an eminently familiar fate. For the intellectual bourgeois, cultural hegemony centred on the capital had, moreover, always demanded an exodus of some duration to Paris. Ropartz, nevertheless, cautioned in verse against the abandonment of native soil long before the composition of *Le Pays*:

Enfant, résiste au désir qui te mord ;  
L'air est plus pur qu'on respire en Armor,  
La langue celte au cœur celte est plus douce :  
Où tu naquis reste jusqu'à la mort.<sup>47</sup>

However, the composer failed to follow his own advice and Ropartz's personal exile was extended by both economic necessity and prophetic zeal; as a pupil of Franck and supporter of the Schola Cantorum, the composer evidently experienced a sense of evangelic, pedagogic mission which resulted in professional appointments outside Brittany but which intensified his sense of loss of ethnic identity and the re-

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<sup>46</sup> McDonald, M., *'We Are Not French!': Language, Culture and Identity in Brittany* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 2, 4 and 320

<sup>47</sup> ['Child, resist the urge which gnaws away at you,  
You can breathe purer air in Armor (Brittany),  
The Celtic tongue is sweeter to the Celtic heart  
Stay where you were born until you die.']

Joseph-Guy Ropartz, 'Pierre qui roule' in *Les Muances* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1892), pp. 60-1.

affirmation of that identity in his musical output. The acute sense of loss and of nostalgic longing for the beloved homeland is musically conveyed in *Le Pays* by a leitmotif which is multifunctional. The first occurrence of the motif is in the Prelude when, signalled by a change of time signature, it transmits the transcendence of Celtic *hiraeth* (yearning) by interrupting the theme which ultimately symbolizes romantic love and the fidelity of the female protagonist (Example 1, bars 2–10).



Example 1: Prelude to Act I. Tual's theme (VS, p. 7).

The motif is developed in Act II, Scene 1, where it forms the basis of a diegetic song in which Tual, boat-building during an Icelandic evening in April, sings to himself in the on-stage world; the song is, moreover, one which presages his own fate:



TUAL. Il travaille à la construction de sa barque.  
Rideau.

Au mouvement.

Un soir il a quit-té le

*rit.* *mf. cresc.* *p* *f* *poco f* *pp*

T. doux pa-ys, Son vieux père et sa promise et ses a-mis.

Sur la mer il est par-ti Et la mer est gran-de!...

*poco f* *p*

Animé.  
Il suspend son travail.

Ahl Ce

Example 2: Act II, Scene 1. Tual's gwerz (VS, p. 49).

Un soir il a quitté le doux pays,  
Son vieux père, et sa promise et ses amis ;  
Sur la mer il est parti  
Et la mer est grande.

Son père est mort et ses amis l'ont oublié ;  
Un autre avec sa belle est marié ;  
Sur la mer il est parti  
Et la mer est grande.<sup>48</sup>

The aria is more than a diegetic interlude, however, for Tual's lament acknowledges not merely the vastness of the ocean and the distance which separates the sailor from familiar territory and significant others, but also the psychological perils of fractured identity. The geographical isolation of the exile is reinforced by a temporal and emotional severance which transmits a sense of concomitant, irreversible loss; ultimately the distant homeland also becomes a symbol of the irretrievable but yearned-for past and the dividing sea allegorically comes to represent the flux of life ebbing to the music of an unbearable regret.

Michel Fleury's commentary, however, accurately notes the modal nature of Tual's melody: 'Ce motif fortement teinté de modalisme a le caractère d'une mélodie populaire.' Yet the observation nonetheless fails to indicate the precision with which Ropartz asserted a particular musical folk idiom as a symbolic marker of the

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<sup>48</sup> ['One evening, he left his sweet homeland  
His old father, his betrothed and his friends  
He went away over the sea,  
And the sea is immense.

His father is dead and his friends have forgotten him,  
His beautiful (fiancée) has married another  
He went away over the sea,  
And the sea is immense']

condition of exile.<sup>49</sup> The modal (Aeolian) nature of the song which accompanies Tual's daydream is an apposite reflection of his fractured sense of identity since the circular nature of the melody suggests the inexorable nature of his longing; in the 'Prelude', moreover, the motif is allowed to fragment, only to be followed by the reiteration of an incomplete arpeggio on E in the final 4 bars of Example 1. The absent third and the aborted attempts to complete the phrase function as effective reminders of the obsessive trajectory of the exile's desire for home.

The phrase equally transmits the confused inner state of the hero as a counterbalance to the virile, masculine ideal of which he has, until this point in the libretto, been the epitome. In Act I, Tual has previously fulfilled all the requirements of the contemporary *islandais* myth: he has narrowly survived a shipwreck and participated in the erotic union between man and ocean described by Loti in the penultimate chapter of *Pêcheur d'Islande*; in addition, he is implicitly promiscuous since he has seduced the Icelandic girl, Kaethe, the daughter of his saviour, by swearing oaths which have no personal spiritual or cultural relevance. When, however, Tual sings of the sailor who has crossed vast oceans only to lose all that he holds dear, his own heroic stature is elevated from the superficial and transitory glamour of the *islandais* of contemporary folklore to that of an actual mythical hero in the universal, classical sense.

For the suppression of the leading note (the absent G sharp of the Aeolian mode), the consequent musical revelation of Tual's bewilderment and the recurrence throughout the score of the leitmotif from which the diegetic song is spun, demonstrate that the

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<sup>49</sup> ['This motif with its strong modal inflection has the character of a folk tune.']  
Fleury (2001), p. 9.

protagonist is engaged in an epic struggle. Tarasti (1979) has suggested that a mythical hero 'is [...] to be regarded as a kind of idealized being who is capable of finding a solution because it is the society which authorizes him to violate social rules established and enforced by taboos. An individual is replaced by a hero because he is psychologically unable to resolve these mythical situations.'<sup>50</sup> As the sole survivor of storm and shipwreck, Tual is already set apart from his compatriots and morally compromised as a result of his questionable oaths of fidelity to Kaethe; nevertheless he is redeemed by the personal quest to which he is inexorably and tragically driven: the drive to regain his homeland and identity. The single-minded determination with which he pursues his fate is an attempt at psychological resolution; he thus acquires heroic stature so that his plight becomes a universal paradigm of the emotional condition of exile. Only context separates Tual from Ulysses and only a tragic flaw in his nature will ultimately effect his downfall.

Yet Tual's leitmotif and boat-building reverie are multifunctional since they serve not only as indicators of psychological anguish, but also as markers of regional identity and of the exotic. 'Un soir il a quitté son doux pays' is a *gwerz*, a traditional Breton *complainte* or lament which acts as a powerful evocation of Brittany itself as well as a symbolic transmission of the hero's nostalgia. *Gwerzioù* are traditionally songs with tragic narratives which fall into distinct categories; mythical, historical, fantastical or associated with particular professions or callings; moreover, the *gwerz* which had once survived through oral transmission had become, by the time of the opera's conception, more widely disseminated and inserted into the cultural life of the capital

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<sup>50</sup> Eero Tarasti, *Myth and Music: A Semiotic Approach to the Aesthetics of Myth in Music, especially that of Wagner, Sibelius and Stravinsky* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), p. 21.

through the efforts of the same regional literary notables who were intent on collecting regional folklore or on tapping in to its prominent themes and rustic appeal.

A significant number of the Breton *gwerzioù* which recount tales of professional or artisan life inevitably relate to the hardships of life at sea or to the grief of those who wait in vain for a sailor's return; thus Ropartz's exploitation of the *gwerz* conforms to the regional traditional lament and yet promotes the discourse which underpins the opera. A *gwerz* written by Anatole Le Braz at the time of the opera's conception similarly records the fate of the Breton 'Icelanders' and provides a cultural context for Ropartz' own recourse to folk idiom; in addition, the fact that this particular poem inspired musical settings by several composers indicates that the Breton traditional lament and its embedded regional cultural markers were accessible and resonant to audiences well beyond the borders of the province.<sup>51</sup>

Dors petit enfant dans ton lit bien clos,  
Dieu prenne en pitié les pauvres matelots.

Chante ta chanson, chante bonne vieille  
La lune se lève et la mer s'éveille.<sup>52</sup>

The similarity to the first strophe of Tual's Act II reverie is immediately striking as the first rhyming couplet transmits the substance of the *complainte* and is followed by two lines of chorus which lend themselves to repetition in the nature of a ballad. It is even possible that this particular *gwerz*, addressed to a sleeping child, destined in turn

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<sup>51</sup> Le Braz's poem was subsequently set to music by Tournemire (1901), Irena Poldowski (1914) and Bourgault-Ducoudray.

<sup>52</sup> ['Sleep little child in your cupboard- bed,  
May God have pity on poor sailors  
Sing your song, sing good old lady  
The moon is rising and the sea is stirring. ']

Anatole Le Braz, 'Berceuse d'Armorique', *La Chanson de la Bretagne* (Paris: Calmann- Lévy, 1901), pp 138-9

to perish on the seas as a cabin boy, was the direct model for Ropartz's own lament in *Le Pays* since Tual's *gwerz* is presented as a lullaby in 6/8 time which emphasizes the maternal pull of the homeland in binary opposition to the seductive ocean. The second and third strophes and the amended final refrain of Le Braz's poem, moreover, refer directly to the plight of the *islandais*:

Aux Pays du Froid ton père a sombré.  
Tu naissais, alors, je n'ai pas pleuré.

Au Pays du Froid, la houle des fiords  
Chante sa berceuse en berçant les morts

Dors petit enfant dans ton lit bien doux  
Car tu t'en iras comme ils s'en vont tous.<sup>53</sup>

Ropartz maintained the simplicity of the lament since characteristically '[...] les chanteurs de *gwerzioù* des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles — appartenant tous au monde paysan — ne s'accompagnaient jamais d'un instrument de musique [...].'<sup>54</sup> Although Tual's leitmotif is subject to Wagnerian development elsewhere in the opera, the sparse orchestral accompaniment, reduced to bare octaves (on A) with a *pp* dynamic for the first three bars of Tual's boatbuilding reverie, ensures that the essential quality of the Breton lament is maintained. In addition, the stark prominence of the vocal line is an apt reminder of the protagonist's isolation; the *gwerz*, then, is both a regionally

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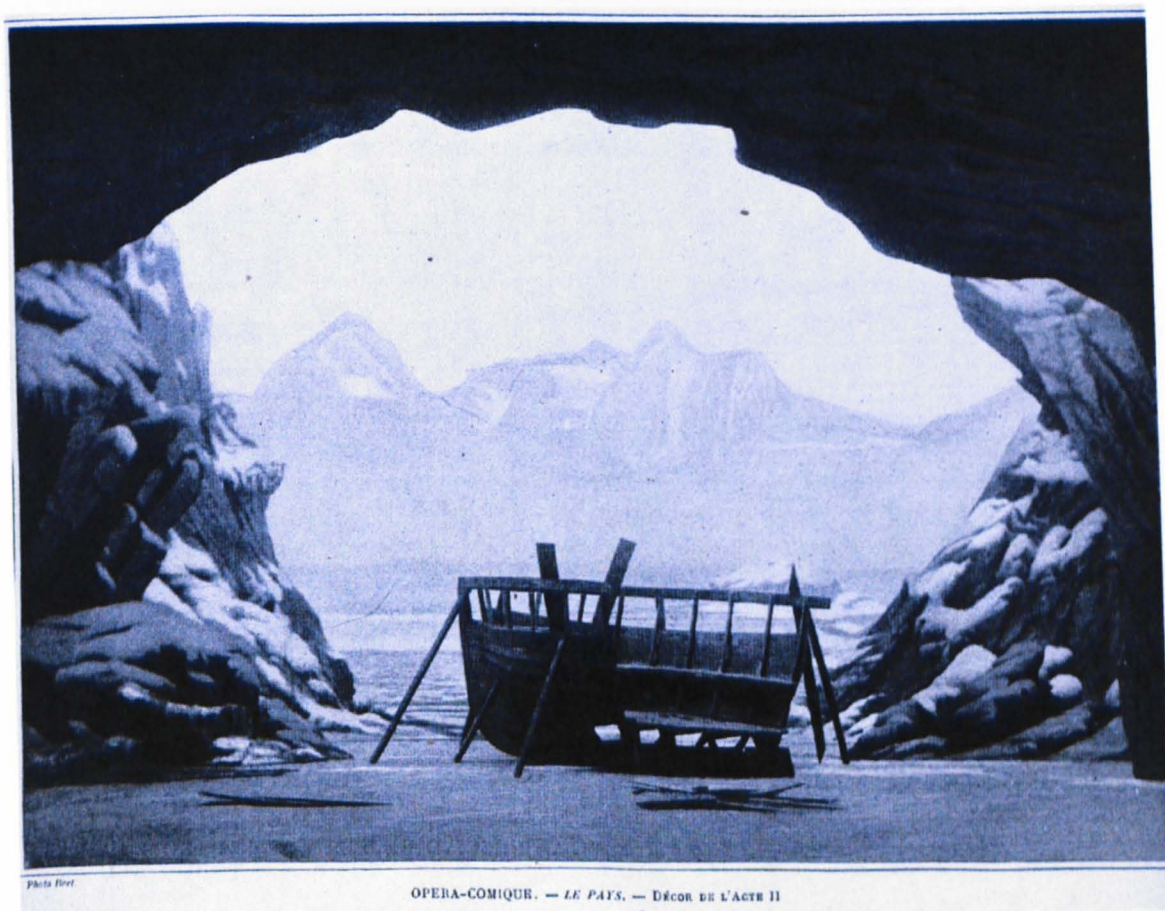
<sup>53</sup>['Your father perished beneath the seas of the Cold Lands  
You were born, I did not cry  
In the Cold Lands, the howling of the fiords  
Sings its lullaby as it rocks the dead

Sleep little child in your nice soft bed  
For you will go away as they all do ']

(In a footnote, Le Braz indicates that the Breton translation of 'Pays du Froid' signifies Iceland.)  
<sup>54</sup>['The nineteenth and twentieth-century *gwerzioù* singers — who were all from the peasantry — never accompanied themselves with a musical instrument. ']  
'Des lais aux *gwerzioù*' in *Musique Bretonne* (1996) p. 24.



specific and a universal lament in which the condition of exile stands equally as a trope for elusive lost youth and as a harbinger of mortality itself.



6: Décor for Act II and Tual's *gwerz*.<sup>55</sup>

The symbolism of Tual's *gwerz* and the imprint of identity which it transmits are further enhanced by the orchestration both of the leitmotif in the Prelude, from which the Act II aria is developed, and its subsequent appearances. These all draw, to varying extents, on the specific timbres of either *cor anglais* or oboe. Indeed the orchestral interlude at the beginning of Act II, which precedes Tual's boat-building reverie and *gwerz*, is characterized by a solo *cor anglais* entry at bar 3 (Example 3). This melodic fragment, heard above a sustained A minor chord in the lower strings, is

<sup>55</sup> Henri de Curzon, 'Le Pays', *Le Théâtre*, 1 (1913), p. 10.

related to Tual's leitmotif; however, here the *cor anglais* solo with its restless, upward sweep, presents an idea which is ultimately taken up by other timbres, but which lacks resolution. Although the vocal entry, which follows at bar 33, evokes the traditional unaccompanied lament, nevertheless, the extended treatment of material which has previously been sounded on the *cor anglais* subliminally reinforces the association between the voice of the exile and that particular instrumental timbre.



Example 3: The opening of Act II (VS, p. 48).

Moreover, the plaintive tones of the *cor anglais*, which in earlier operas had been exploited simply to convey melancholy,<sup>56</sup> attain a heightened intensity in *Le Pays* where they can be interpreted as regional markers. Although Wagner had earlier deployed the *cor anglais* to mimic a shepherd's pipe in Act III of *Tristan and Isolde*, Ropartz's choice of this particular timbre can be perceived, in spite of the Breton setting of *Tristan*, as more regionally specific, for it provides the modern orchestra's closest equivalent of the Breton folk instrument, the *bombarde*, and is specifically associated throughout the opera with nostalgic evocations of the homeland.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> It was deployed for this purpose in Halévy's *La Juive* (1835).

<sup>57</sup> The *bombarde* is a shawm, a powerful and strident double-reeded wind instrument which is usually pitched in B flat; it is always played with another instrument because of the demands made on the player's breathing.



Ropartz's knowledge of the *bombarde* as a fundamental element of the folk music tradition of Brittany is indisputable. The instrument is not only currently specific to Brittany, but during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was identified with particular regions with which the composer had strong associations.<sup>58</sup> The folklorist François-Marie Jacob (1922) described the geographical division which delineated the territory of itinerant *couples biniou-bombarde*<sup>59</sup> as follows:

La ligne isothermique du biniou part de Daoulas, remonte vers le nord-est dans la direction de Morlaix [...] ; puis descendant vers le sud-est en une pente très douce, elle englobe les cantons de Huelgoat, de Carhaix, de Rostrenen, Gouarec, traverse le pays de Loudéac et remonte vers le nord-est pour entourer les cantons de Moncontour et de Collinée ; enfin, laissant Ploërmel à l'est, elle descend sur le pays de Questembert et enveloppe la presqu'île de Rhuy.<sup>60</sup>

Recent research by Jean-Michel Guilcher has confirmed that, during the Third Republic, the tradition of *bombarde* playing was centred on Basse Bretagne and in particular in the area which encompasses Vannes;<sup>61</sup> the sight and sound of the instrumental combination was commonplace and was so deeply embedded in regional life that it graced both sacred and profane celebrations. Iconography specific to the time and locale demonstrates that *biniou-bombarde* duos were inextricably associated with any public festivities involving dance and the presence of such ensembles was obligatory at weddings. In Victor-Marie Roussin's painting *Les Noces de Corentin le*

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<sup>58</sup> Other traditional folk instruments which were specific to particular areas within Brittany were the clarinet and violin, the *veuze* (South Breton cornemuse), and the *vielle* (hurdy-gurdy). A *tambour* could be added to any of these combinations and the accordion was a late addition to the ethnic music tradition.

<sup>59</sup> ['Paired bagpipe and *bombarde* players']

<sup>60</sup> ['The isothermic line of bagpipe (and thus *bombarde*) playing starts at Daoulas, goes up again towards the north-east in the direction of Morlaix, then going south-east in a gentle curve, it takes in the cantons of Huelgoat, Carhaix, Rostrenen, Gouarec, crosses the countryside around Loudéac and then goes up towards the north-east again to skirt the cantons of Moncontour and Collinée, finally, leaving Ploërmel in the east, it goes down towards Questembert and takes in the presqu'île de Rhuy.'] François-Marie Jacob, 'Les biniou et les bombardes', *Bulletin de l'URB*, May 1922, cited in *Musique Bretonne* (1996), p. 153.

<sup>61</sup> Jean-Michel Guilcher (1963) *La Tradition populaire de danse en basse-Bretagne* (Douarnenez : Coop Breizh, Le Chasse Marée/ArMen, 1995).

*Guerveur et Anne-Marie Kerivel* (Figure 7), the *sonneurs* grace a place of prominence above the wedding guests and even seem to usurp the position once accorded to angel musicians in Renaissance nativities; amidst the wedding finery and proliferation of local costume they possess a unique significance proclaimed by both the musical activity and the exuberant vanity demonstrated by the peacock feather in the *bombarde* player's hat. The Breton Pardons, the popular religious festivals dedicated to particular saints, similarly depended on the provision of accompaniment by *biniou-bombarde* ensembles whose music reinforced the heady combination of religious fervour, drink, dance and ultimately freedom from social restraint and convention.



7 : Victor-Marie Roussin, 1880, *Les Noces de Corentin le Guerveur*, oil on wood, Quimper: Musée des beaux-arts.

Although the Ropartz family estate of Lanloup, and indeed Guingamp, where Joseph-Guy was born, lie beyond the ‘isothermic line’ designated by Jacob and are situated in an area better known at the time for its folk tradition of clarinet and violin playing, the composer nevertheless received his secondary education (1879–1882) at the Jesuit Collège de Saint-François-Xavier at Vannes which was at the heart of the *biniou-*

*bombarde* country; his widowed mother had also re-settled at Mauron in Morbihan<sup>62</sup> following the death of Sigismond Ropartz in 1875. There were, moreover, *bombarde* players who ranged beyond the boundaries of the area of highest concentration; the instrument was frequently played on board Breton ships to entertain and hearten sailors, for example, and the *sonneurs* were itinerant by nature, so that Ropartz would have been familiar with both the sight and sound of this combination of folk instruments.

Indeed, he was uniquely placed to envisage the fusion of Breton folk music and lyric theatre which deployed regional symbols. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, ethnic Breton music, and the *bombarde* and *biniou* in particular, achieved a significantly augmented status. In the same way that Breton notables and intellectuals had sought, in the first half of the century, to retrieve and reassess regional literature to counter a perceived Southern domination in the claim to the foundation of the central language and nation, so the attention of later disciples of Breton renaissance was ultimately drawn to the role of regional music in the assertion of ethnic identity. Sigismond Ropartz, Joseph Guy's father, in the same address to the Congrès celtique of 1876 in which he proposed a concerted effort for the development and resurgence of Breton music also noted in 'la musique d'origine ancienne et autochtone [...] une sorte de flottaison difficile à déterminer entre le mode majeur et le mode mineur'; he further associated the essential nature of this music with 'l'orchestre national' of the *bombarde-biniou* ensemble.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Morbihan is the department in which Vannes is situated.

<sup>63</sup>['In old, original regional music (there is) a sort of indistinct, floating boundary between major and minor modes which is difficult to describe precisely.'] Sigismond associated this music with the 'national orchestra', the *bombarde-biniou* duos. See Le Moigne-Mussat (1988), p. 362.

By the time that Joseph-Guy was living in Rennes, active in the promotion of the Breton artistic movement and collaborating with the writer Tiercelin in the production of the literary and artistic journal *L'Hermine*,<sup>64</sup> the recognition of the significance of regional folk instruments was well underway and their potential for exploitation as a potent regional symbol was already being hailed by 'hard' and 'soft' regionalists alike.<sup>65</sup> The first competition for regional bands was held in Saint-Brieuc in 1881; at this time, a local paper, the *Echo de Guingamp*, expressed the expectation that:

La lutte ouverte entre les hautbois, binious et tambourins donnera à ce concours un attrait d'un nouveau genre ; cette innovation, tout à fait locale, ne manquera pas d'attirer à Saint-Brieuc un grand nombre de sociétés et d'auditeurs qui pourront profiter de cette circonstance pour visiter les côtes de Bretagne et voir dans leurs costumes nationaux les musiciens populaires de cette région pittoresque.<sup>66</sup>

However, this perception of the folk musician as a repository of the visually quaint and aurally bizarre, and thus as the ideal vehicle for the transmission of the most superficial aspects of local colour, was transitory. In 1898, the formation of the URB (L'Union Régionaliste Bretonne)<sup>67</sup> ensured the status of regional musical festivals and actively promoted the *bombarde-biniou* duo as a potent symbol of threatened ethnic identity. François Cadic in 1905 declared: 'Rien n'est plus approprié que le biniou pour traduire l'âme du Celte. Il est l'instrument qui chante le mieux ses joies et ses passions et qu'il comprend le plus volontiers.'<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> 1889–91. See Djemil (1967), p. 286.

<sup>65</sup> 'See Chapter 1, pp. 10–11.

<sup>66</sup> ['The open battle between oboes (*bombardes*) *binious* and tambours will bring a new sort of attraction to this competition; this entirely local innovation cannot fail to draw a large number of societies and audiences to Saint Brieuc (and) they will be able to benefit from the opportunity to see the local musicians of this picturesque locale in their regional costume.'] *Musique Bretonne* (1986), p. 374.

<sup>67</sup> ['The Breton Regionalist Union']

<sup>68</sup> ['No instrument is more fitting than the *biniou* for expressing the soul of the Celt. It is the instrument which best sings his joys and passions and which he most readily understands.'] Cited in *Musique Bretonne*, (1996), p. 377.

Ropartz was, indeed, involved in the dissemination of the symbolic potential of Breton folk instruments. Alongside *L'Hermine*, which Tiercelin and Ropartz had co-produced, a new journal, *Le Sonneur de Bretagne* (The Breton Player), appeared in 1892.<sup>69</sup> This journal, which promoted all the regional arts, and to which Ropartz contributed on occasion even after his departure for Paris in 1891, not only exploited the semantics of the word '*sonneur*' in its title to imply both the creation of music and the broadcasting of news, but also relied on the visual impact of a *bombarde* player in full ethnic costume on the title page (Figure 8). This image places the instrumentalist amongst other regional symbols — several menhirs form the background, broom is sprouting nearby and a *biniou* lies on the ground only partly obscuring a shield with the regional coat of arms — so that the journal, with which some of Ropartz's closest friends and colleagues were associated, was influential in cementing and transmitting the symbol of the *sonneur* as a trope for ethnic identity.

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<sup>69</sup>The journal was published monthly in Rennes from February 1892 until December 1894.





8: Cover design (31 March 1892) for *Le Sonneur de Bretagne*, the musical review of the Breton movement.<sup>70</sup>

The *bombarde-biniou* combination, then, in spite of its specificity to a mere segment of Brittany, had, like the *gwerz*, inserted itself into the hegemonic collective imagination as a symbol of the province as a whole. When the opera house in the provincial capital of Rennes was restored after a disastrous fire, the re-designed auditorium ceiling, completed in 1913, the year of the first performance in Paris (at the Opéra-Comique) of *Le Pays*, asserted an instantly recognizable regional identity by providing the spectacle of a Breton *farandole* in which dancers in ethnic costume are accompanied by a *bombarde-biniou* duo.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Reproduced in Le Moigne-Mussat (1988), p. 369.

<sup>71</sup> The fire took place in 1856.

The fresco, by the Saint Malo artist Jean-Julien Lemordant (Figure 9), positions the dancers in a brilliant blue sky where the *farandole* snakes its way heavenward through the clouds; the musicians are an integral part of the scene but are accorded special status since they are raised on a dais above the revellers on the left-hand side; again there is a conflation of the peasant instrumentalists and the cherubic horde of familiar religious art. An entirely secular symbol of regional identity is thus infused with a religious significance which adds gravitas to a musical tradition more usually associated with rural, peasant entertainment; high art music and its regional folk counterpart are united architecturally beneath the roof of a building specifically constructed for the performance of lyrical theatre and this same union is manifested musically in the treatment of particular timbres in *Le Pays*.



9 : Jean-Julien Lemordant, 1913, Design for the ceiling of the Théâtre de Rennes, oil on canvas, Rennes, Musée des beaux-arts.



Yet, Ropartz's intention to conflate a specific instrumental timbre, that of the *cor anglais*, the refined orchestral substitute for the *bombarde*, with the melancholic plight of the exile is not merely confined to the Act II lament, for the substance of the *complainte*, initially voiced by Tual as the outward expression of inner turmoil, reaches its apotheosis in the final act when the protagonist's angst, hitherto consciously controlled, takes subliminal and devastating shape. Here, the vocal element is removed entirely since the psychological action is conveyed as a shifting, impressionistic dreamscape which is orchestrally sketched as Tual sleeps. Although morally bound to the steadfast Kaethe, he has discovered that, following the winter period of home leave, the Breton fishing smacks have once again been sighted off the Icelandic shores; this knowledge precipitates the repressed yearning for his native land into his consciousness in the form of a dream in which a fluctuating, shadowy vision of the Breton landscape finally gives way to an image of the Paimpol fleet in full sail.

The stage directions for the dream sequence are extremely precise: 'Sur l'obscurité, maintenant presque complète, apparaît une image d'abord très vague du pays breton.'<sup>72</sup> Moreover the significance of this episode, which augments the emotional content of the Act II lament, is demonstrated by the fact that, whilst it heralds the dénouement of the dramatic action of the opera it does not appear in the original novella and all such subtle changes relate directly to Ropartz's own artistic intent to explore the state of exile. The prominent *cor anglais* entry, which coincides exactly with the direction 'La vision reparaît une troisième fois et fait place à une escadrille de goélettes paimpolaises qui, toutes voiles déployées, semblent venir à la rencontre

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<sup>72</sup> ['In the darkness, by now almost complete, there appears an image, vague at first, of the Breton homeland.']

de Tual',<sup>73</sup> re-states the *gwerz* leitmotif, in the middle of the texture, in an acute evocation of ethnic identity (Example 4). Here, significantly, the approximation of the *bombarde* timbre also propels the harmony from tonal ambivalence to security:

La vision reparait une troi-

sième fois, mais de plus en plus précise, puis peu à peu fait place à une escadrille de goélettes paim-polaises qui, toutes voiles déployées, semblent venir à la rencontre de Tual.

Example 4: Act III, Scene 3. Tual's vision (VS, p. 116).

Yet the *cor anglais* is never deployed within *Le Pays* as an exact counterpart for the *bombarde*; at no point is it accompanied by a *biniou* type drone or a rhythmic tambour beat which would more accurately reproduce the sound of the folk ensembles which were being increasingly promoted as symbols of regional identity at the time of the opera's conception. The presence of the *cor anglais* within the texture is related to Tual's personal vision of home and therefore functions as a metaphor of the distorted view of reality which his exile has conjured; the strident pairing of the

<sup>73</sup> ['The vision reappears for a third time and takes the shape of a fleet of fishing boats from Paimpol which seem to be coming towards Tual in full sail.']

ethnic shawm and bagpipes are ignored in favour of a timbre which recalls the sounds of the native land in a diffuse and romanticized manner.

Fleury, in the notes which accompany the only recording of *Le Pays*, describes the opera as the 'Song of the Exile'; however, Ropartz's exploration of fractured identity is equivocal and his own separation from his native province was a very different type of exile from that imposed on the male protagonist in the opera. Ropartz, although professionally engaged in Alsace and Lorraine for most of his working life, had declared: 'J'étais assidu à ma tâche, mais la pensée (était) constamment tournée vers ma Bretagne lointaine.'<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, his 'exile' was clearly sought and embraced; the directorship of the conservatoire at Rennes became vacant twice<sup>75</sup> during the composer's tenure of his Nancy and Strasbourg posts and no apparent negotiations or enquiries were initiated on his behalf regarding possible employment on native Breton soil. In addition, Ropartz's absence was never total since the possession of the family estate, to which he ultimately retired, offered the possibility of periodic contact with Brittany; the province represented a usual destination for family holidays during the years when his children were young, and indeed, although work on the opera was completed at Nancy in 1912, it was actually commenced during a summer holiday in 1908 at Pornic on the Breton coast.<sup>76</sup>

The male protagonist in the opera, Tual, demonstrates a similarly equivocal relationship with Brittany: 'Mais mon pays, m'eût-il été aussi cruel que l'Islande m'a

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<sup>74</sup> ['I was committed to the task in hand but my thoughts constantly turned towards my distant Brittany.']

Fleury (2001), p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> In 1899 and 1902. See Le Moigne-Mussat (1988), p.371.

<sup>76</sup> Djemil (1967), pp. 285–88, records Ropartz's holidays at Lanloup. Pornic, formerly in Brittany, is now officially in the department of Loire-Atlantique.

été douce, m'eût-il renié, m'eût-il chassé, qu'il resterait toujours pour moi le pays.'<sup>77</sup>

Adhesion to the idealized construct of the beloved homeland is measured off in subjunctive clauses which indicate a destructive relationship in which the victim is self-sacrificially compliant; social cohesion in a new cultural environment and the possibility of psychological growth are demonstrably unattainable. Moreover, the ambivalence implicit in the discourse relating to exile and ethnic identity is augmented by the title of the work. In the same way that Lalo's nameless king in *Le Roi d'Ys* is actually pivotal to the dramatic action and symbolically vital in the transmission of subliminal psychological and socio-political content, so the ambiguous identity of the terrain designated in the title of Ropartz's opera is central to an interpretation of the investigation of cultural identity which is conducted in the opera.

The literal translation of the opera title *Le Pays* is 'The Homeland'; although unnamed, the identity of the nation in question is seemingly never in doubt since Le Goffic, both in the novella 'L'Islandaise' (which similarly neglects to refer to Brittany in its title) and in the opera libretto, is swift to indicate the ethnic identity of the shipwrecked sailor; Kaethe, in her third interchange with Tual at the beginning of Act I, declares, 'Si tu n'avais pas été blessé, tu serais à présent dans ton pays en Bretagne avec les hommes de ta race'.<sup>78</sup> However, the opera is set in Iceland and stage designs visually transmitted potent ethnic signifiers pertinent to that particular country rather than to Brittany. Photographs of the 1913 Paris première demonstrate that while Tual was dressed in the conventional garb of the seaman — long boots and

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<sup>77</sup> ['But my country, even if it had been as cruel to me as Iceland has been kind, even if it had denied me, even if it had rejected me, it would still remain, for me, my homeland.']

<sup>78</sup> ['If you had not been wounded, you would be in your own country, Brittany, now, with the men of your (own) race.']

fisherman's jersey — Kaethe's costume, in contrast, faithfully represented many of the ethnic elements described in the Le Goffic story — the headdress of flat cap and tassel is clearly distinguishable, for example. The lighting of the second act, moreover, calls for an evocation of polar night which is illuminated only by the reflection of distant snows and the stage directions for the third act require the reproduction of the interior of an Icelandic *badstofa*.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> A single-storey dwelling made of lava stone and with a roof of earth and narrow windows.





Photo Rev.

YVAL  
(M. Salignac)

KATHIE  
(M<sup>lle</sup> Lubin)

THÉÂTRE NATIONAL DE L'OPÉRA-COMIQUE. — *LE PAYS*

10: Costumes for the 1913 Paris première.  
*Le Théâtre*, 1 (June 1913).



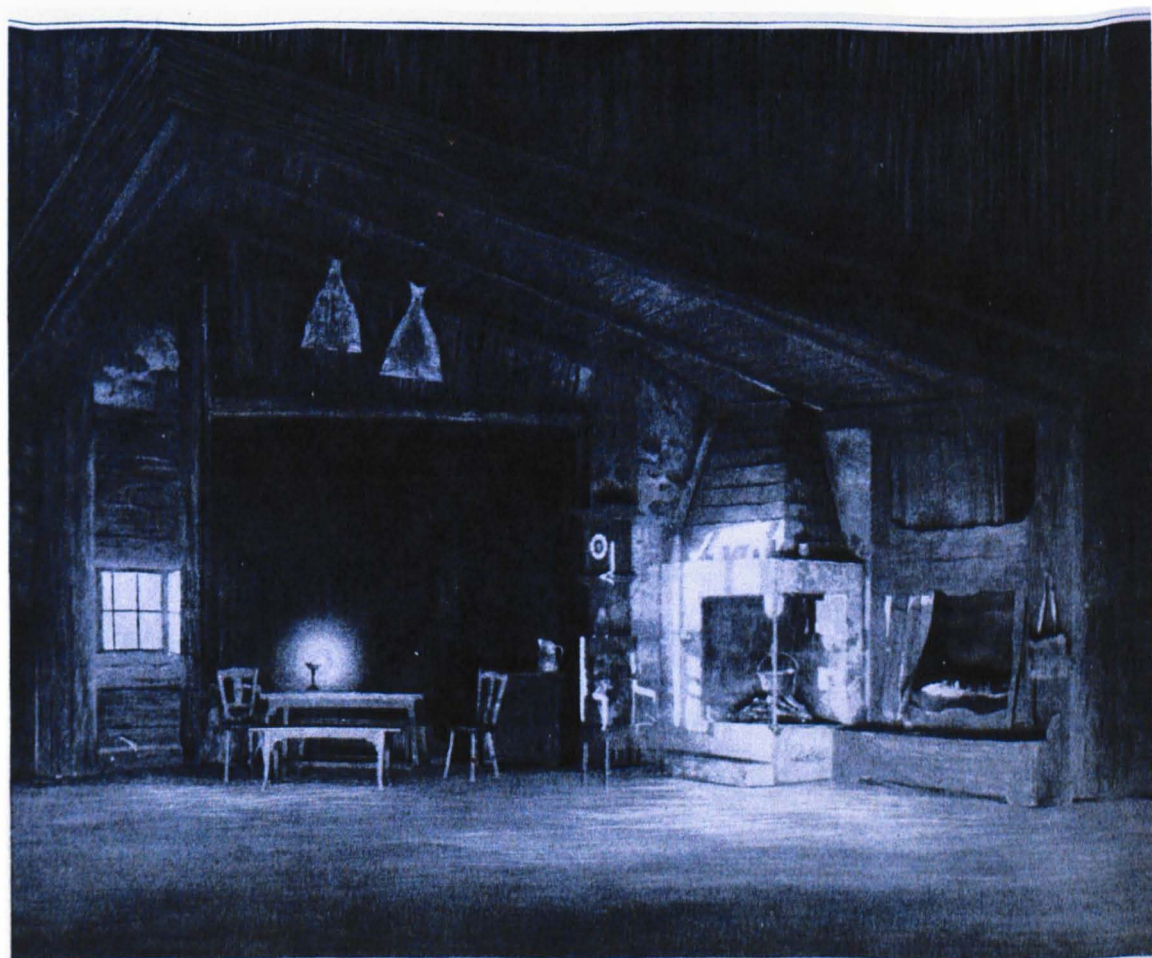


Photo Bert.

OPÉRA-COMIQUE. — *LE PAYS*. — Décor de l'ACTE III. — 1<sup>er</sup> TABLEAU, par M. DESHAIS

11: Stage design for the final act of *Le Pays*  
*Le Théâtre*, 1 (June 1913).

Although Ropartz had declared that his initial interest in *L'Islandaise* lay in the dramatic potential of the plot and its suitability for translation into lyrical theatre, the overriding attraction of Le Goffic's story was the opportunity it afforded to 'exprimer toute la nostalgie du Breton exilé'.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, in allowing Iceland to represent a polarized, purgatorial antithesis to the idealized homeland, Ropartz introduced the possibility that the unnamed country of the title might equally be interpreted as a

<sup>80</sup>['To examine all the nostalgia of the exiled Breton.']  
 Le Moigne-Mussat in *La Bretagne à l'opéra* (1994), p. 82.



reference to the land in which the fisherman is stranded. Such an interpretation is reinforced by the balanced, even impartial manner in which the two main protagonists are treated and this balance itself is immediately apparent in the cast-list of the opera libretto and its literary source.

For this is an opera which eschews the provision of a full chorus and which relies exclusively on three principals to convey the dramatic action; thus Tual (tenor) and Kaethe (soprano) function in relation to the pivotal persona of old Jörgen (baritone), Kaethe's father. The concision and frugality of the plot were actively welcomed by Ropartz who refused all offers from an obliging Le Goffic to extend the material in order to comply with normal operatic convention; Djemil notes:

Mais il lui faut convaincre l'écrivain de l'inutilité des chœurs et des danses, ainsi que de l'avantage de remplacer un dialogue prosaïque entre Jörgen et son gendre par la superbe rêverie de Tual du deuxième acte, commentée splendidement par la musique seule.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, from the time that he first conceived the work, Ropartz had intended that *Le Pays* would transmit psychological drama and demonstrate emotional landscapes rather than promote physical action or events. In a letter to Étienne Destranges, he wrote that his conception of lyric theatre was based on 'l'absence de tout détail, tout épisode, toute extériorité dont la nécessité n'est pas indispensable au développement de l'action intérieure qui est toute la pièce'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> ['But he had to convince the writer that choral numbers and dances would serve no useful purpose, as well as of the advantage of replacing a prosaic dialogue between Jörgen and his son-in-law with Tual's superb second act reverie which is conveyed splendidly by the music alone.'] Djemil (1967), p. 247.

<sup>82</sup> ['The absence of any detail, episode or exterior event which is not absolutely essential for the inner action which is the whole point of the piece.'] Ibid., p. 247.

The reduction of physical action to a minimum and the displacement of dramatic impulsion from exterior spectacle to inner, subconscious mindscapes promote both a sense of ambivalence relating to the identity of the homeland, to which each protagonist aspires or belongs, and a concomitant balance between the cultures explored. Superficially, Brittany and Iceland, represented by Tual and Kaethe, are apparently polarized and opposed as familiar and alien territories; however, Ropartz, although Breton himself, never valorises either ethnicity at the expense of the other. Indeed, whenever Brittany exerts its nostalgic hold on Tual, Iceland is symbolically asserted as the repository of steadfast, faithful love which has the potential to solace the inextinguishable longing of the exile. Kaethe, at the end of Act 2, when she breaks the news of her pregnancy to Tual, declares: 'Et je sais que l'Islande est la terre des amours fidèles.'<sup>83</sup> her confidence in her power to retain her lover reposes in the solid cultural values of her own homeland as much as in the child whose birth may provide the possibility of social cohesion for the exile.

Musically, the nostalgia of the exile implicit in the *gwerz* theme is counterbalanced by a second theme which represents Kaethe and thus both romantic love and physical passion. The theme (Example 5) is first stated in the 'Prelude' at the top of the texture and precedes the first introduction of the *gwerz* melody:

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<sup>83</sup> ['And I know that Iceland is the land of constant love.']

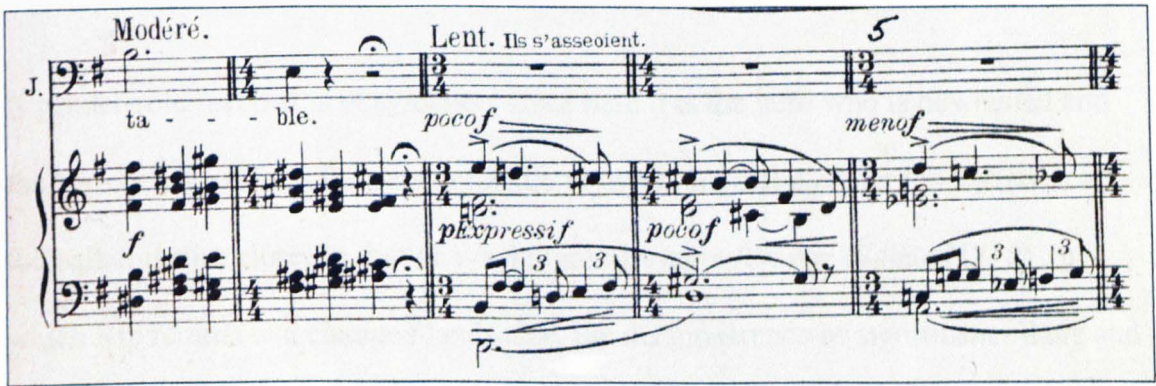


Example 5: Prelude to Act I. Kaethe's theme (VS, p. 7).

The nature of the melodic fragment which variously conveys Kaethe, Iceland and emotional commitment is diametrically opposed to Tual's 'Breton' theme. Consigned to the violins in its first appearance, the lyrical melodic line is largely conjunct and the *pp* dynamics enhance the *cantabile* string playing. There is, moreover, the potential for constant renewal in the circular nature of the theme. The characteristic falling phrase is reasserted by means of upward leaps of a seventh and a fifth, so that the emotion which it conveys is presented as a constant source capable of resurgence and yet with the potential for expansion and development when the opportunity arises. Tual's and Kaethe's themes are frequently developed, juxtaposed or contrapuntally combined as the need arises. Thus, the point at which the relationship of the lovers begins to fragment is signalled by Kaethe's opening motif which struggles to assert itself at the top of the texture, and yet is countered in the bass by



Tual’s *gwerz* motif, and subsequently rhythmically and melodically subverted (Example 6, bars 3–5).



Example 6: Act III, Scene 3 (VS, p. 93).

Yet the haunting *gwerz* which exposes the ills of deracination and exile is itself balanced by a poignant re-telling of what purports to be an Icelandic legend: ‘Olaf and Hilda’, at the end of the second act. Just as Tual’s lament in the opening scene of the same act was an addition to the original novella, so Kaethe’s ballad, an affirmation of fidelity, was an insertion into the libretto and thus a deliberate extension by Ropartz to the original plot. At the corresponding point in ‘L’Islandaise’, Kaethe is mute and her attitude is one of silent resignation to Tual’s departure: ‘Kaethe écoutait, le sang figé’.<sup>84</sup> Ironically, the story, which the Icelandic girl has recounted to the barely conscious Tual during his convalescence, also deals with lost identity and its retrieval. In the diegetic ballad sung by Kaethe, the knight Olaf goes out hunting while his faithful wife Hilda awaits his return; in the course of the hunt, however, he is enchanted by the Elf Queen and his absence lasts for a hundred years. Although the so-called Icelandic legend is familiar since it possesses orally transmitted or literary counterparts in many cultures — most notably those which deal

<sup>84</sup> [‘Kaethe listened, her blood froze.’]  
Le Goffic (1908), p. 31.

with the extended, enchanted sleep of a young girl, such as Perrault's *Belle au bois dormant* (1696) — it is nonetheless given a significant, idiosyncratic twist in this version and bewitched absence is conflated with the psychological distance of exile.

A gender-role reversal is in evidence, since here it is the hero who is bewitched and the heroine who effects the *dénouement* and psychological closure; the narrative of the ballad is thus closer to that of Washington Irving's *Rip van Winkle* (1818) in which Rip returns to a changed landscape, the disappearance of significant others and social isolation. Olaf's plight, in Kaethe's song, is, in addition, undeniably parallel to Tual's anguish so that the words of the returning warrior seem to belong to the opera protagonist:

J'ai souffert, souffert à fendre l'âme !  
De tels maux la mémoire oncques ne s'abolit.<sup>85</sup>

However, Hilda is also gifted with special powers and in answer to Olaf's despair, she causes three strange riders to enter the court at strategic points in the narrative. The first knight to cross the threshold is called *Oubli*, or 'Oblivion' and thus Olaf loses all recollection of pain. Symbolically, Kaethe offers this same benison to Tual so that human love is presented as an antidote to exile and a means of psychological progression. Yet human love is suggested as an elixir in all its forms since Hilda next indicates that the marriage bed is prepared and that the joys of amorous love await the returning Olaf. He, nevertheless, is unwilling to seize the moment:

Cœur glacé convient à blanche tête.  
Trop vieux est le sorbier pour pouvoir refleurir.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> ['I have suffered, suffered enough to cleave my soul!  
Such ills are not banished from the memory.']

<sup>86</sup> ['A frozen heart goes with a white head.  
The rowan tree is too old to flower again.']

Unwilling to accept defeat, Hilda causes the knight named *Plaisir*, or 'Pleasure', to enter the court and the ensuing marital embrace lasts for three years. Every terror of exile exposed in Tual's *gwerz* is therefore balanced and obtains a response from the 'Ballad of Olaf and Hilda': obliteration from the memory of those who remain culturally rooted and the ensuing loss of identity for the exile — 'Ses amis l'ont oublié' — is countered by a willing surrender to oblivion; the betrayal of absence — 'Un autre avec sa belle est marié' — is answered by love manifested in the erotic, affectionate and loyal attributes of the spouse. Ultimately, Kaethe's ballad also suggests that conjugal fidelity will assuage not merely the loss of cultural identity, but also the self-annihilation of mortality. At the end of the legend, Hilda offers Olaf repose and with his consent allows the final rider, *Trépas*, 'Death', to enter. The contrast between Tual's lament, which began the second act, and Kaethe's ballad, which ends it, thus functions as an allegory of the journey from youth to age and resigned maturity as much as for a demonstration of juxtaposed ethnicities. Tual's response, which curtails Kaethe's song, seems to presage a new commitment which will allow for personal growth:

Chère femme, c'est ainsi que nous vivrons, ainsi que nous mourrons ! Et tu seras pour moi une autre Hilda, et je serai pour toi un autre Olaf.<sup>87</sup>

It is, nevertheless, the *gwerz* melody which intrudes and to which the curtain falls.

Nevertheless, the equilibrium established by the antecedent and consequent *gwerz* and ballad which frame the central act of the opera seems have been deliberately sought by the composer. Ropartz had, indeed, at the time of his involvement with the proposed stage version of Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande*, some twenty four years earlier,

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<sup>87</sup> ['Dear wife, that is how we will live and how we will die. You will be another Hilda to me and I will be another Olaf to you.']

taken an extended trip to Sweden and Norway for the express purposes of research.<sup>88</sup>

An article in *Nantes-Lyrique* described the composer's purpose:

Il va faire en Suède, en Norvège et en Islande même, un voyage d'études d'où il compte rapporter des impressions et des mélodies indigènes pour sa partition.<sup>89</sup>

Although the journey was interrupted at Odda by a telegram which necessitated his return to Nantes, his fascination with the lands of the North was acknowledged by those who knew him. Djemil<sup>90</sup> endorses the article written by Jean Maillard in which he writes:

Il y avait à la fin de cette route qui passait par la capitale suédoise, non point un banal reportage pour un quotidien de Paris, mais un véritable rendez-vous d'amour. Pas dans la froide Scandinavie, mais en quelque lointaine Thulé dont les chemins maritimes partaient précisément de là. Rendez-vous d'amour avec ceux de sa race qui, chaque année, partaient des côtes du Goëlo vers la Mer d'Islande et dont il voulait, en la langue immatérielle d'Orphée, évoquer les espoirs et les craintes, les peines et les joies.<sup>91</sup>

Maillard's reference to 'Thule' in this context suggests not merely Iceland, but some distant magic land at the borders of the known world;<sup>94</sup> moreover, his choice of vocabulary signals the fact that Iceland was not merely the destination for the Breton *islandais* fisherman but also the starting point, for Ropartz, of an exploration of the exotic. Ralph Locke has rightly noted the ways in which the transmission of musical exoticism depends on a range of binarisms between 'the Self and Other', between 'nearness and distance', between 'the real and the fictive' and between 'home and

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<sup>88</sup> He left at the beginning of November, 1888 and returned in April 1889.

<sup>89</sup> ['He is going on a study trip to Sweden, Norway and even Iceland whence he hopes to bring back impressions and local melodies for his score.']

Unsigned article, 'Ca et là', *Nantes-Lyrique*, 20 October 1888, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Djemil (1967), p. 135.

<sup>91</sup> ['At the end of the itinerary which took in the Swedish capital he had (undertaken) not merely a banal report for a Paris daily but a real lovers' meeting. Not in cold Scandinavia but in some distant Thulé whose sea routes began there (in the north). A lovers' meeting with those of his own race who left the Goëlo coasts every year destined for the Icelandic Sea and whose hopes and fears, anguish and joy he wished to evoke in the divine language of Orpheus.']

<sup>94</sup> Jean Maillard, 'J-Guy Ropartz et la Bretagne', *Annales de Bretagne*, December 1964, p. 628.



elsewhere'.<sup>92</sup> However, in *Le Pays*, apparently clear polar boundaries are blurred: Tual's identity is fractured since he dwells with the 'other'; Iceland, the supposedly distant 'Thule', is equally a tangible reality and shelter for the exile; Brittany the erstwhile homeland has now become the longed-for 'elsewhere' and 'fictive' in that it can only be partially and imperfectly conjured in the imagination of the stranded fisherman. The state of exile is thus examined under the microscope of exoticism and neither Icelandic nor Breton culture is pre-eminently promoted; the gravitational pull of nostalgia for the homeland is always counteracted in the music and the narrative by the equally magnetic tug of the unfamiliar.

Indeed, since Tual's capitulation to his longing for native soil results in self-destruction, then it could be argued that, far from promoting 'the song of the exile' as Fleury suggests, Ropartz is subliminally conveying an ambivalent portrayal of the effects of deracination. Tual's attempt to regain his homeland denies the creative product of his exile, since he abandons both Kaethe and her unborn child; it thus associates his nostalgic flight with psychological and spiritual sterility, and ultimately with death. It effectively precludes any positive, creative use of the state of exile.

Kaethe's pregnancy, is, however, only hinted at in the *Le Goffic* novella:

Elle savait maintenant que c'était fini de leurs amours, que ni ses prières, ni ses caresses, ni même le petit être qu'elle portait dans ses flancs ne seraient capables de retenir le Breton.<sup>93</sup>

The pregnancy is, however, given increased significance in the libretto; Kaethe tells Tual that he is to be a father and future paternity is suggested as a means of achieving social cohesion.

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<sup>92</sup> Locke (2009), pp. 66–9.

<sup>93</sup> [She knew now that their love was at an end, that none of her prayers or caresses or even the small being which she carried in her womb would be able to prevent the Breton from leaving.] *Le Goffic* (1908), p. 31.

Depuis quelque temps ... j'espérais ... mais je ne voulais rien dire avant d'être certaine ... Tu vas être père, Tual.  
Ah ! désormais je suis sûre de toi. Tu ne me quitteras plus.<sup>94</sup>

Thus the additional material in the libretto adds a subtle nuance to perceptions of ethnic belonging. The score of *Le Pays* is dedicated, both in the manuscript and printed versions, to Ropartz's own children who were raised far from Brittany, and since his own separation from Brittany was so pedagogically productive, any precise interpretation of the exploration of exile within the opera remains elusive.

However, in spite of the cultural equilibrium of the opera and Ropartz's earlier research trip, there is no indication that any specific Icelandic 'mélodies indigènes' were deployed in the opera. The musical language of Kaethe's 'Olaf and Hilda', moreover, reinforces ethnic dualities. Fleury notes that the accompaniment figures of the ballad are 'dans l'esprit du choral (l'Islande est terre protestante)'.<sup>95</sup> Yet it is worth noting that above the stolid 'chorale' figures which can be perceived as symbolic representations of Iceland, Kaethe actually sings a folk melody which is distinctly modal (Lydian) in nature, which is akin to the Breton tradition of danced song and which arguably challenges the confines of the *badstofa* by subliminally recalling the open air and the accompaniment of *bombarde* and *biniou*.

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<sup>94</sup> ['I have been hoping for some time but I did not want to say anything before I was sure. You are going to be a father, Tual.

Ah! Now I am sure of you. You will not leave me again.']

<sup>95</sup> ['He is identified with the 'other country' that of Kaethe and faithful love: his musical theme is in the nature of a chorale (Iceland is a protestant land.)]



Example 7: Act II, Scene 2. The Lydian opening of Kaethe's ballad (VS, p. 71).

Nevertheless, cultural ambivalence is also the defining hallmark of this second diegetic interlude. Percy Grainger noted that in Nordic folk-song traditions: 'Dancing accompanied by epic ballad singing is still a passion [...]; hand in hand in a ring, they will dance the night through with hardly a break.'<sup>96</sup> Kaethe's *Ballade*, then, appears musically to suggest cultural affinities rather than to emphasize binary oppositions.

The provenance of the ballad, which symbolically promotes Iceland as the land of steadfast love, is, moreover, suspect. The names 'Hilda' and 'Olaf' are deployed to provide ethnic verisimilitude, but the legend appears to be far removed from known Icelandic myths and sagas. In fact, the nature of this particular story not only links it to Breton folklore tradition but also unites it to the artistically ubiquitous *Barzaz Breiz* of La Villemarqué. Although Ropartz and Le Goffic used a modern myth as the basis for the novella, libretto and opera and although Ropartz was scrupulously even-

<sup>96</sup> T. P. Lewis, *A Source Guide to the Music of Percy Grainger* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1991), p. 152.

handed in his treatment of two disparate cultures, the additional material introduced to the libretto at the composer's direction in reality proclaimed the ethnic roots of the Breton composer and librettist.

Ropartz had, indeed, already acknowledged the stature of La Villemarqué and the status of the *Barzaz Breiz* in the renaissance and dissemination of Breton culture. The collection of poetry for which Ropartz and Tiercelin were jointly responsible in 1889, *Le Parnasse breton contemporain*, contained an example of Le Villemarqué's work entitled 'La Patrie';<sup>97</sup> in addition, one of Ropartz's own contributions to *Le Parnasse*, 'Jeffik',<sup>98</sup> is particularly significant since, in parentheses beneath the title, the words 'Poème imité du Barzaz Breiz' appear<sup>99</sup> and the poem is dedicated to the author of that work.

The *Barzaz Breiz* does indeed include various tales in which the protagonists are subject to enchantment, where returning heroes possessed of amazing powers of endurance are unrecognized by family members, or where the beloved is awaited through the passing years in vain; for example the saga of Lez Breiz, the Breton warrior who returns after an absence of ten years and is mistaken for a stranger by his own sister explores a similar theme of exile.<sup>100</sup> However, just as Olaf, in Kaethe's ballad, is enchanted by the Elf Queen, so the story 'Le Seigneur Nann et la fée' concerns a knight, the Seigneur, who leaves his wife to go hunting and is then enthralled by a Korrigan; his faithful spouse waits in vain, but is ultimately reunited with him in death. Whilst the link between Kaethe's ballad and 'Le Seigneur Nann'

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<sup>97</sup> *Le Parnasse breton contemporain*, pp. 300–1.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 253–4.

<sup>99</sup> ['A poem in the style of the *Barzaz Breiz*.']

<sup>100</sup> La Villemarqué (2003), pp. 87–92.

might appear to be tenuous, the mere result of a familiarity arising from the folkloric content of both stories, La Villemarqué's notes at the end of the *Barzaz Breiz* tale are nonetheless revelatory.<sup>101</sup>

Here, La Villemarqué traces the story of Seigneur Nann through its manifestations in other cultures and discloses: 'On chante, en Suède et en Danemark, une chanson sur le même sujet, intitulée: *Sire Olaf dans la danse des Elfes*, dont il existe plus de quinze variantes'.<sup>102</sup> Although the three knights Oubli, Plaisir and Trépas do not figure in the 'Swedish' storyline identified by La Villemarqué, the main elements of the ballad which Ropartz included in the second act of *Le Pays* are undeniably present. Enchantment which effects a prolonged separation of the hero from hearth and home, an epic struggle to regain that which is lost and steadfast love as the anti-toxin to death are all present in the Breton story 'Le Seigneur Nann' from the *Barzaz Breiz* and in 'Sire Olaf' from the explanatory notes which follow. The additional material provided by Ropartz to amplify Le Goffic's very concise story 'L'Islandaise', therefore, where it most seeks to convey the ethnic identity of the 'alien' land where the exile has been stranded, draws directly on a work which has always been the lifeblood of Breton cultural renaissance. Ropartz's contact with the work of La Villemarqué preceded his field trip to Sweden and Denmark, which was undertaken some twenty four years before the composition of the opera, and it thus seems likely that he availed himself, in part, of the 'Seigneur Nann/Sire Olaf' ballads when the need arose to manipulate the original source of the libretto in order to promote his own artistic intent.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp.91-2.

<sup>102</sup> ['In Sweden and Denmark they sing a song, of which there are more than fifteen variants, called *Sire Olaf in the Elf Dance*.']

Each of the variants of the story in *Le Pays* and the *Barzaz Breiz*, however, conflate absence with enchantment, so that exile, symbolically, is associated with the seductive, exotic feminine ‘other’ and with intemperate desires over which the protagonist has no control. Olaf, in Kaethe’s ballad, is in the thrall of the Elf Queen; Sire Olaf in La Villemarqué’s alternative version is invited to an unholy dance with the same queen and Seigneur Nann, similarly, encounters erotic temptation in the form of the Korrigane:

La Korrigane était assise au bord de sa fontaine, et elle peignait ses longs cheveux blonds,  
Et elle peignait avec un peigne d’or (ces dames-là ne sont point pauvres).<sup>103</sup>

In Tual’s declaration of love at the beginning of Act I, the erotic response is similarly conjured by the sight of Kaethe’s hair and the mention of her coiffure constitutes further additional material which does not appear in Le Goffic’s ‘L’Islandaise’. Although Fleury comments on the prevalent symbolism of abundant hair in early twentieth-century art and literature and describes it as ‘un atour primordial de l’éternel féminin’,<sup>104</sup> he nevertheless perceives the reference to Kaethe’s locks in *Le Pays* as the antithesis of the symbolism of Mélisande’s tresses in Debussy’s *Pelléas*:

C’est bien là la déclaration d’amour, au plein sens du terme, descriptive du sentiment par référence aux stéréotypes ayant alors cours. Les tresses de Kaethe, rayons de soleil pétrifiés dans ce tableau qui partage l’immobilité figée de certaines compositions de la peinture académique, font figure d’antidote à l’émoi trouble recélé par la vie foisonnante des cheveux de Mélisande.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup> [‘The Korrigane was sitting at the side of the fountain and was combing her long blonde hair’ And she combed with a comb of gold (such ladies are not at all poor).’]  
La Villemarqué (2003), p. 88.

<sup>104</sup> [‘A quintessential attribute of eternal femininity.’]

Michel Fleury, *L’Impressionnisme et la musique* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p. 189.

<sup>105</sup> [‘There is the declaration of love in the fullest sense of the word and the emotion is described with reference to current stereotypes. Kaethe’s tresses, rays of sun, frozen in this picture which shares its lack of movement with certain academic paintings, form the perfect antidote to the troubled emotion conveyed by the abundant life of Mélisande’s locks.’]

Yet, whilst Kaethe's hair does not achieve the thematic, dramatic and structural significance which Mélisande's locks assume in *Pelléas*, it should not be dismissed as the projection of a stereotype which connotes passivity. It proclaims, in fact, the precision of Ropartz's musical projection of symbolic, folkloric references. Tual's declaration of love is delivered on the shore of the fiord and his avowal of emotional commitment is made against the backdrop of the sinister bog Hrafuaga. Kaethe is linked, therefore, to the temptresses of the *Barzaz Breiz* by both her powers of physical seduction and by the element of water. When Tual is physically aroused at the sight and touch of her long hair, she is revealed, symbolically, as a siren: possessed of magic powers since she is capable of prolonging his absence and, with her knowledge of the fatal waters of Hrafuaga, of controlling his fate.

Here (Example 8, bars 3–8), the overwhelming force of physical attraction is conveyed by diatonic repose and the restless, overlapping statements of Kaethe's 'love' motif which underpin the vocal line; each statement at the top of the texture is immediately taken up in the bass line before being allowed to achieve its characteristic completing leap which is restricted, initially, to an upward movement of a third rather than the usual seventh or fifth. Finally the pulses of the motif are allowed to rise as Tual succumbs to the sensual stimulus of siren-tresses.



T. qui ta fait le teint si clair? Les tres-ses de tes che-

*poco f*

5 veux sont surtes é - pau - les\_ comme deux rayons de miel.\_

10 En - tre tes lè - - vres tes dents bril - - lent,

*p* *mf*

Example 8: Act I, Scene 1. 'Your tresses fall on your shoulders like two sunbeams.'  
(VS, p.15)

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the siren was a pervasive cultural theme in European art, literature and music; equally, the siren is a consistent protagonist in Breton folk narratives. Kaethe, in *Le Pays*, shares many of the salient features of the sea maidens who populated such works:

A strange-haired woman with sad singing lips,  
Cold in the cheek, like any stray of sea [...].  
Men seeing her face [...],

Fell in hot love, and having lain with her, died soon.<sup>106</sup>

Tual, indeed, meets his own untimely death beneath the waters of Hrafuaga after breaking the oath of loyalty to Kaethe which he swore on its shore. Yet physical desirability and arcane knowledge of the waters are not her only claims to ‘magic’ skill, for she is possessed of the power of language and this is, indeed, crucial to her relationship with the physically and psychologically deracinated hero:

Va ! Je connais les Bretons, leur âme nostalgique et changeante. Petite fille, j’ai servi chez le *cocman* de Patriks-fjord où leurs bateaux faisaient relâche. Ils m’ont appris leur langage ... et ce qu’il faut penser d’eux.<sup>107</sup>

In the opera libretto, reference is made to specific Breton names — the wrecked fishing boat in which Tual’s fellow sailors have perished is *L’Étoile d’Arvor*, the Arvor Star, for example.<sup>108</sup> The language in which Kaethe is proficient is thus, by implication, Breton, for this is the language spoken by the fishermen; she is thereby empowered since she can communicate with her lover in his vernacular tongue and with emotional insight. Linguistic fluidity ensures that she can negotiate racial barriers and moreover, bewitch the hero and distract the audience. At the moment when siren skills are most required, when impending maternity demands that she must anchor Tual, she deploys her linguistic sinuosity to best effect. Her Icelandic song, although sourced from Breton folklore, is delivered phenomenally in actual French which is, nevertheless, ‘heard’ diegetically by Tual as Breton. This subliminal deception and subsequent obfuscation of the diegetic level — the distinction between ‘showing’ and ‘telling’ is blurred — augments the transmission of fluid, fractured

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<sup>106</sup> A. Swinburne. Cited in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 266.

<sup>107</sup> [‘Oh I know the Bretons, and their nostalgic, flighty souls. As a little girl, I worked for the *cocman* (liquor store merchant) in Patriks-fjord where they came when they were on shore leave. They taught me their language ... and what sort of an opinion to have of them.’]

<sup>108</sup> *Arvor* is Celtic (Breton) for ‘the land of the sea’.

identities. The added nuance provided by Kaethe's multilingual skills, moreover, is specific to the opera and the additional material introduced by Ropartz. In the original libretto source, no mention is made of regional patois and the second language with which Kaethe is familiar is that of central hegemony: 'Elle savait assez de français pour se faire entendre du malade'.<sup>109</sup>

In her linguistic flexibility, Kaethe resembles Bizet's Carmen; her potential for survival and for negotiating racial boundaries is augmented as, indeed, is her ability to be at one and the same time both exotic and 'other' and yet familiar. McClary comments of Carmen 'Her capacity to speak many languages and to speak them so well that she fools others is one element of her success in getting what she wants.'<sup>110</sup> Although innocent to the extent that she is merely driven by the age-old need to protect hearth and home, and in no sense criminally exploitative in the manner of Carmen, linguistic sinuosity is nonetheless a significant trait of Ropartz's heroine; her fluency ensures that she is, paradoxically, a destabilizing seductive force and the psychological anchor in a hostile environment.

The cultural identity of Jörgen, Kaethe's father, whose peripheral role in the original novella was extended for the opera and who functions as a fulcrum to the confrontation between the two main protagonists, is apparently less ambivalent: 'Il représente la tradition de l'Islande, austère, saine et solide, et se voit conférer la dimension d'un prêtre'.<sup>111</sup> His motif, characterized by the falling third between the

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<sup>109</sup> ['She knew enough French to be able to communicate with the sick man.']

Le Goffic (1908), p. 25.

<sup>110</sup> Susan McClary, *Carmen*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>111</sup> [He represents the Icelandic tradition, austere, healthy and dependable, and takes on the quality of priesthood.]

Fleury (2001), p. 8.



first two notes and the rising fourth between the second and final notes is at the top of the texture and contrapuntally combined in the accompaniment, in one of its most notable appearances, with fragments of Kaethe's 'love' theme as he blesses the union of the lovers (Example 9, bars 6–12). The underpinning dominant pedal and the tierce de Picardie (in F sharp major) at the cadence implicitly convey his stolid reliability. However, the motif is always subject to manipulation and is later used comically to depict his drunken homecoming after drinking gin with the 'cocman' (Example 10).

Très calme.

J. Mainte - nant, Tu-al, je crois à la

5 Tual et Kæthe s'agenouillent, Jörgen leur impose les mains.

sincé-ri - té de ton a - mour. Soyez u-

10 Retenez. Au mouvement.

nis en - fants, je vous bé - nis!

poco Doux et expressif

Example 9: Act 1, Scene 2. 'Be as one, my children' (VS, p. 47).



J. *Embrasse moi d'a-bord!* *Je n'ai jamais é-té si*

J. *gai!* *J'ai en-vie de chan - ter tout le temps!*

Example 10: Act III, Scene 2. 'I have never been so jolly!' (VS, p. 84).

Nevertheless, although his chorale-like, stolid leitmotif arguably imparts a religious quality to his discourse, the rites which Jörgen invokes are similarly ambiguous. It is Jörgen who ensures that Tual swears fidelity by the sinister Hrafuaga and who acts as its augur and acolyte.

Tant d'êtres, avant toi, y furent engloutis qu'on ne sait plus leur nombre.  
Il est là, sous l'Islande, comme une pieuvre énorme. Il est vivant. Il  
sommeille l'hiver. Mais en avril, il se réveille. Il ne parle pas, mais il  
entend.<sup>112</sup>

Jörgen's theme is, nevertheless, motivically and tonally linked to the motif of the sinister Hrafuaga which is associated with the framing key of the opera, F sharp minor; thus Jörgen is identified as the high priest of a non-Christian, pagan religion.

<sup>112</sup> ['So many people have been swallowed up, before you, that we have lost count of the number. It lies there beneath Iceland like a huge octopus. It is alive. It sleeps in winter. But in April it stirs. It doesn't speak but it hears.']



JÖRGEN. La main faisant visière sur  
Dans le  
son front.  
Hra - fu - a - ga!... Dans le Hra - fu - a -  
ga!... A - vec les cor -

Example 11: Act III, Tableau 2, Scene 2. Jörgeŋ's theme appears in the bass line to convey the menace of the awakening Hrafuaga (VS, p. 137).

He officiates, moreover, in a ritual which is arguably as much Celtic as Icelandic. Le Roux establishes the pre-eminent significance of fire and water in Celtic, druidic lore by citing the Greek geographer Strabo: 'Ces druides, et d'autres comme eux, professent que les âmes sont impérissables, le monde aussi, mais qu'un jour pourtant régneront seuls le feu et l'eau'.<sup>113</sup> In the opera, pagan religious ritual is associated with a water source which possesses occult powers, and with a natural outdoor site (the

<sup>113</sup> ['These druids, and others like them, assert that souls are imperishable, as is the world, but that one day water and fire will reign alone.']  
Strabo, IV, 4. Cited in Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h (2000), p. 61.



nearest Icelandic equivalent to the druidic grove). Therefore, when Jörgen most seems to transmit Icelandic identity, he is, in fact rehearsing a cultural identity which touches the depths of the Breton soul; the brooding morbidity, which he exploits to ensure Tual's fidelity to his daughter, is equally emblematic of Celticity. Celtic symbolism, ironically evoked by the Icelandic landscape, is thus accorded an important place in the opera and a distinct leitmotif which is first stated in the third bar of the 'Prélude' is given to the sinister Hrafuaga. It suggests the hideous depths beneath its wintry, frozen surface.

**Prélude.**

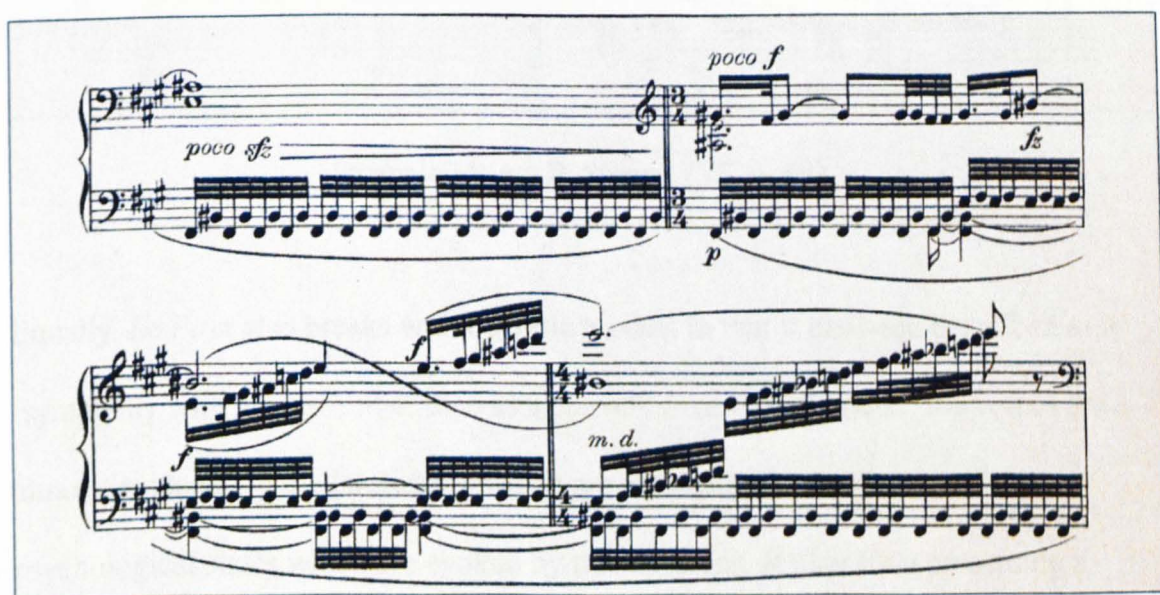
The musical score for the 'Prélude' is presented in three systems. The first system is marked 'Lent.' and 'PIANO.' and begins with a treble staff and a bass staff. The second system continues the piano part. The third system shows the piano part with a 'poco sfz dim.' marking. The score features a prominent, repeating eighth-note motif in the bass staff, which is the Hrafuaga theme.

Example 12: Prelude to Act I. The Hrafuaga (VS, p.1).

The Hrafuaga theme is nonetheless also developed, subjected to diminution and deployed in association with an additional motif suggesting rising flurries of the menacing crows who are the harbingers of doom (Example 13). The motif in this



guise continues to evoke the bleak Icelandic landscape; nevertheless, the acceleration aptly sketches a contrasting image of the Hrafuaga in which the dangerous excitement of the Spring thaw heralds Tual's defection and demise. In addition, the use of the whole tone scale transmits a sense of tonal disorientation which conveys the menace of the melting ice and presages the fractured identity of the Breton fisherman and his inevitable fate.



Example 13: Prelude to Act I (VS, p. 2).

The regional markers, then, that inform *Le Pays* are ambivalent; that ambiguity, moreover, is assisted by the variety of musical languages deployed by Ropartz in the course of the opera. Whilst Ropartz' debt to his musical past, to Franck, and thus to Wagner, is evident in his recourse to significant leitmotifs as fundamental structural building blocks in the music, the innovations which serve his exploration of exile are equally notable. His declaration that 'on peut tout se permettre'<sup>114</sup> finds expression not merely in recourse to the whole-tone scale but in the way in which the resonant

<sup>114</sup> Laurence Davies, *César Franck and his Circle* (London, Barrie and Jenkins, 1970), p. 315.

chords in the harmony which supports Tual's modal *gwerz* make use of a chromatic palette; the phrase 'Sur la mer il est parti' (He sailed away) is underpinned by diminished and half-diminished chords.



Example 14: Act II, Scene 1 (VS, p. 49)

Equally, *Le Pays* also breaks with operatic models in that it has been described as a 'symphony with voices' rather than as a conventional lyrical drama; the voices are almost incidental to the landscapes which are musically depicted and to the psychological states which are evoked by those visions. Rather than presenting a straightforward interrogation of exile, the opera probes the complex and fluid nature of identity itself; Brittany and Iceland are both presented as exotic and 'other' and their binary relationship — home/alien locus — is interchangeable. Brittany is, in fact, at its most seductive when viewed fleetingly and imperfectly from a distance in the manner in which an Impressionist painting is regarded; the skill of the composer emerges in the extent to which he achieves, in music, the same 'intentional blurring' found in paintings by Monet and Pissarro.<sup>115</sup>

The difference, therefore, between composer and protagonist, both victims of exile, is that, for Tual, the mere recollection of the distant homeland is insufficient; he pursues

<sup>115</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *The History of Art*, (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1978), p. 413



a Chimera, an illusory and doom-laden fantasy. Fatally flawed and destined like Icarus to fly too close to the unattainable object of desire, he is nonetheless a tragic hero whose destructive experience of exile is symbolic of psychological sterility and loss of creativity. Ropartz, however, in spite of his declared intention to explore the dilemmas of fractured cultural identity in the opera, constantly and creatively articulated his personal vision of the beloved native land throughout his career. *Le Pays*, however seems to have marked a significant turning point in his musical expression. Florent Schmitt, at the time of the Paris première of *Le Pays* in 1913, noted:

De fait, on entrevoit chez M. Ropartz, en même temps qu'une attraction naissante pour les nouveaux dieux que, jusqu'alors il avait semblé méconnaître, un désir de concrétiser davantage sa pensée, sans pour cela en réduire le cadre.<sup>116</sup>

Schmitt's enthusiastic reception of the opera demonstrates the extent to which Ropartz had developed a mature, unique musical voice which, as this chapter has demonstrated, owed as much to the modal melodies of his homeland as to the influences of the past.

This work, completed in 'exile' represented the composer's own reflection in maturity on the dilemmas of racial separation, but also demonstrated a positive, creative catharsis and a rejection of ethnic elitism. In spite of his undeniably assured musical evocations of Brittany, Ropartz does not attempt to 'autoexoticize' his homeland. This process, identified by Ralph Locke as the act of consciously rendering oneself and native land exotic, is discernable in all of

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<sup>116</sup> ['In fact, we can discern in M. Ropartz's work in addition to a growing attraction for new gods whom, thus far, he has ignored, a desire to delineate his musical thinking more clearly, without in any way restricting the structure.']

Cited in Fernand Lamy, *J. Guy Ropartz: L'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Durand et Cie, 1948), p.63.

the other operas in this study, even when composers are Breton by choice rather than by birth. However, Ropartz uniquely opts for a complex and nuanced evaluation of cultural deracination which valorises both of the juxtaposed and opposing cultures.<sup>117</sup>

The opera, which is recognized as a 'Breton' work within the province,<sup>118</sup> proved, in fact, to be a model of artistic decentralization. Its first performance was given in Nancy and subsequent productions disseminated its equivocal exploration of the importance of *topos* throughout and beyond the Hexagon.<sup>119</sup> In the apparent promotion of a common Celtic cultural identity as a means of asserting a wider, European belonging, Ropartz was thus ahead of his time and although his cherished, distant homeland always remained a fertile ground for inspiration in self-imposed exile, his liberal and empathetical approaches to cultural identity inevitably facilitated his subsequent career path. Following his 1919 appointment as director of the Conservatoire de Strasbourg, he was required to reassert French musical identity which had, in the contested borderland of Alsace, been '[...] méthodiquement et sournoisement étouffé jusqu'alors au profit du seul Art Allemand.'<sup>120</sup> His extended musical exploration of the construction, rehearsal and maintenance of identities in *Le Pays*, however, must have fitted him uniquely for that task.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Locke (2009), p. 76.

<sup>118</sup> It was included in the exhibition 'La Bretagne à l'Opéra' at the Musée Départemental Breton in Quimper in 1994.

<sup>119</sup> *Le Pays* was premièreed at Nancy in 1913. Subsequent performances outside the capital took place in Altenburg in Germany in 1914, in Geneva, 1918, in Strasbourg, 1921, 1924, in Angers, 1933, and in Rennes, 1941. It was broadcast from Lyon in 1947. The first fully staged performance for eighty-eight years was given in Iceland, at the Hafnarhus in Reykjavik, on 27 May, 2006.

<sup>120</sup> '[...] methodically and stealthily stifled in favour of the unique promotion of German Art.'] Lamy (1948), p. 19.

<sup>121</sup> See also: I. Petitdemange, 'Les concerts symphoniques de Nancy sous la direction de Joseph Guy Ropartz', *Annales de l'Est*, I (1994), pp. 3–34.

## A Lullaby of Insidious Harm

### *La Lépreuse*

Opéra-Comique, 7 February 1912

Ils me nomment ici la fleur, la fleur lépreuse,  
Ils me nomment le vice, ils tremblent à ma voix ;  
Car ma voix domine et l'ongle de mon doigt  
Déchire et met à bas leurs visions menteuses.<sup>1</sup>

If, as Roger Shattuck has suggested, *fin-de-siècle* Paris was a stage 'where the excitement of performance gave every deed the double significance of private gesture and public action',<sup>2</sup> then Henry Bataille's drama *La Lépreuse* (*The Leper Girl*) and the opera by Sylvio Lazzari for which it provided the libretto, furnished significant and highly-charged scenes which were played out against an already formidable backdrop. The plot of both works, freely adapted from a Breton legend, concerns the deliberate transmission of the deadly and disfiguring disease of leprosy during the course of an erotic relationship which challenges established patterns of patriarchal social control and directly counters stable, unequivocal, rural communal values with feminine menace. Moreover, the narrative further serves to demonstrate an ambivalent, inhumane religious response to disease and to unconventional social mores.

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<sup>1</sup> [Here, they call me the flower, the leprous flower,  
They call me vice, they tremble at the sound of my voice;  
For my voice rules and my fingernail  
Tears and sunders their deceitful visions.]

Jean Sardou, *La Fleur Lépreuse. Le Théâtre*, 2, 114 (1903), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Arts in France 1885-1918* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 6.

The controversy which surrounded the opera, and which ultimately delayed the première by twelve years, ensured that the theatrical events which accompanied all attempts to bring the work to the stage of the Opéra-Comique quadrupled its dramatic, cultural and social significance. Reactions to the work were entirely commensurate with mediaeval responses to the tragic malady of the title; it rang a warning bell which heralded the approach of significant and dynamic shifts in both social discourses and perceptions of the function of opera.

Indeed, both Parisian and Breton reception of the opera at the time of its première vacillated between a wholehearted and enthusiastic response to Lazzari's score and an ambivalent reaction to the drama on which it was based. Moreover, the transfer of the narrative from the dramatic to the lyrical stage allowed the symbolic content of the original work to become a transparent metaphor for social disorder; the addition of music facilitated a decoding of the allegorical significance of the drama and amplified the presentation of the leper which Susan Sontag, in her study of the cultural significance of disease, has identified as: 'a social text in which corruption was made visible; an exemplum, an emblem of decay.'<sup>3</sup>

Lazzari's enthusiasm for a libretto which set the dramatic action within Brittany was consistent with the major part of his operatic output; indeed, his first opera, *Armor*, and the later *La Tour de feu* made use of the same topos.<sup>4</sup> Since Lazzari was neither Breton, nor indeed French by birth, his persistent use of that particular locale is psychologically revealing. Born in Switzerland, his relocation to Paris in pursuit of a

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvio Lazzari, *Armor* (1895), *La Tour de feu* (1928).



musical career seems to have provoked a particular response to the inevitable problems of assimilation and social integration.<sup>5</sup> The greater part of Lazzari's operatic output thus reflected his unequivocal adoption of a modified national identity which responded to French central hegemony but which was, nonetheless, accessed via the embrace of Celtic folklore. Lazzari's redefinition and modification of his personal and professional identities clearly reflects the process which Castells has defined as the formation of 'project identity', the conscious choice of a new or modified identity from a multiplicity of options in response to personal aspiration.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the process of nationalization and integration with French cultural identity was, in Lazzari's case, accelerated and reinforced by his recourse to Breton regional markers which, paradoxically, ensured his cultural assimilation within the nation as a whole through association with a particularly intense form of ethnic belonging.<sup>7</sup>

## The Libretto

The original drama, which was adopted almost wholesale for the libretto of Lazzari's opera *La Lépreuse*, was an early work of the popular dramatist Henry Bataille.<sup>8</sup> He, however, could lay no more claim to Breton ancestry than Lazzari. His own interest in the region arose from the apparently random choice of venue for a working holiday at the start of his early career as a painter:

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<sup>5</sup> Sylvio Lazzari (Bozen, Tyrol, 30 December 1857–10 June 1944, Suresnes).

<sup>6</sup> Castells (1997), p. 8. See Chapter 1, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Lazzari became a naturalized Frenchman in 1896.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Bataille (Nîmes, 4 April 1872–2 March 1922, Rueil-Malmaison).

Bataille's career spanned the arts. He originally intended to make his living as an artist; an early collection of lithographs, *Têtes et pensées* (1901), contains portraits of famous early twentieth-century literary figures such as Jules Renard, André Gide and Octave Mirabeau. As well as a popular dramatist, he was also a noteworthy poet.

J'avais jeté les yeux sur une carte de France pour y dénicher une forêt, si possible insoupçonnée des touristes. J'hésitais entre la forêt de la Baume dans le Midi et celle de l'Huelgoat dans le Finistère. Comme celle-ci possédait un gouffre et des rochers légendaires, j'optai pour elle.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the encounter which Bataille, towards the end of his life, identified as the trigger for the original drama was as quaint and picturesque as the folkloric source on which the work was based. The playwright, in the preface to the published script, described a fortuitous meeting in the forest with two itinerant, peasant musicians; this event was recounted in the diction of fairy tale and Bataille seemed to be intent on the establishment of an authentic provenance, not merely for the source of the drama which furnished the opera libretto, but also for the manner in which this source was accessed by an outsider, a non-Breton national:

Un jour passèrent deux chanteurs populaires, un vieillard et un enfant. L'enfant était étrange, impressionnant avec ses yeux d'eau et sa voix hiératique. Il tombait en catalepsie et le vieillard l'étendait sur deux dossiers de chaises pour nous prouver la rigidité du corps pendant la crise. Ce petit rapsode était une véritable harpe. Tous les airs Bretons, même les plus anciens, il les connaissait et les chantait en proie à une sombre et languide extase. Immobile, ses yeux pâles fixés au plafond, il psalmodiait comme psalmodierait une idole tibétaine. Les chanteurs disparurent.<sup>10</sup>

The location of this incident is significant; the forest of Huelgoat in the *arrondissement* of Châteaulin in Finistère was once part of a much larger forest which

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<sup>9</sup> ['I cast my eyes over a map of France to (try to) discover a forest which was, if possible, unknown to tourists. I hesitated between the forest in the Baume in the Midi and that of Huelgoat in Finistère. As the latter had a gorge and legendary rock formations, I opted for that one.']

Henry Bataille, *Théâtre Complet 1: La Lépreuse, L'Holocauste* (Paris: Flammarion, 1922), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> ['One day, two folk singers, an old man and a child, passed by. The child was strange, impressive (character) with watery eyes and a sing-song voice. He fell into a trance and the old man stretched him out on two chair backs to demonstrate the rigidity of his body during the crisis. This little wandering minstrel was a veritable harp. He knew all the Breton tunes, even the very oldest, and he sang them in a state of sombre and languid ecstasy. Completely still, his pale eyes fixed on the ceiling, he chanted as a Tibetan idol would have chanted. The singers disappeared.']

*Ibid.*, p. 11.

stretched across Brittany. That ancient forest was the legendary Forest of Brocéliande which is central to Arthurian legend and topographical references relating to Huelgoat still bear witness to the mythical resonance of the now separate, easterly remaining section of the forest.<sup>11</sup> Bataille thus reinforced the authenticity of his source by locating its acquisition within an enchanted forest with well-recognized mythical connections and he further strengthened the impact of its transmission by acknowledging the agency of a mysterious minstrel who was gifted with arcane powers.

Bataille assiduously traced the apparent folkloric origins of *La Lépreuse* and justified his initial interest in the ancient story by describing the subsequent researches which he undertook in order to determine the origins of the *gwerz* (lament) that had captured his imagination after the encounter in the forest. Those writers whose works had underpinned the nascent Breton nationalist movement and the cultural renaissance of the region, whether by the provision of rediscovered, re-evaluated folklore or by the exploration of more contemporary ethnic themes, were cited by Bataille both in the original preface to the first published version of the play and, more extensively, in the preface to the later edition on which he was working at the time of his death; nevertheless, the manner in which the sources accessed by the dramatist were acknowledged is suspect and subsequent charges of plagiarism levelled against Bataille affected the reception of the opera by native Breton composers at the time of its première.

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<sup>11</sup> Brocéliande (now reduced in size) is the Forest of Paimpont (Ile et Vilaine). Huelgoat contains features such as *Le Camp d'Artus* (Arthur's Camp) and *La Grotte d'Artus* (Arthur's cave). It also contains a well-preserved open-air laundry, or *lavoir*, which may be significant since the act of communal washing contributes to the allegorical significance of the libretto.

A lengthy exegesis of the dramatist's veneration of folkloric material nevertheless accompanied the first edition of the play; speaking of himself in the third person singular and thereby subliminally strengthening the intended portrait of the dedicated and reverent researcher, Bataille declared:

Et puisqu'il avait élu tel sujet pour le besoin de sa pensée, ce faisant, il s'est appliqué à ne point déformer la Bretagne contée. Il a conservé strictement, comme s'il eût continué la tradition, les formes séculaires du *gwerz*. Quand il a introduit des expressions locales en usage, il a été aussi exact que possible, s'autorisant des travaux de MM. Luzel et Le Braz et de cet admirable *Breiz-Izel*<sup>12</sup> de M. de la Villemarqué, dont il est difficile de nier l'authenticité.<sup>13</sup>

Bataille's error in ascribing part of the title of Luzel's work to La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz* was unfortunate; Luzel had been the prime critic of the latter work and since both authors were still living at the time of the first performance of the play, Bataille's attempts to cite every Breton writer of note in order to authenticate his own work inevitably invited rejection at regional level. Luzel, who had originally supplied Bataille with a printed copy of the only remaining fragment of the *gwerz* in his own possession, thus cautioned frostily against the use of its theme as the basis for a drama:

J'avoue que je ne vois pas le parti que vous pourriez tirer de cette légende en la portant à la scène : le sujet en sera toujours déplaisant et ne se prête pas au théâtre.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The works which Bataille cites (and whose titles he confuses) are: La Villemarqué, *Barsaz Breiz* (1839); F. M. Luzel, *Gwerziou Breiz Izel* (1868). Bataille may also be referring to the poem, *La Lépreuse*, by Anatole Le Braz.

<sup>13</sup> ['And since he had chosen such a subject to satisfy his artistic need, in so doing, he undertook not to adulterate Breton folklore. He retained strictly, as if he had continued the tradition, the age-old forms of the *gwerz*. When he introduced local expressions still in current use, he was as precise as possible, taking as his authority the works of MM. Luzel and Le Braz and M. de la Villemarqué's admirable *Breiz Izel* whose authenticity is difficult to deny.']

Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>14</sup> ['I confess that I cannot see any good use that you could make of this legend by transferring it to the stage: the subject will always be distasteful and does not lend itself to (adaptation for) the theatre.']

Ibid., p. 13.

Luzel's response to Bataille's youthful plans, however, belied the enthusiasm which Breton writers had previously displayed for mediaeval tales which focused on the malicious transmission of leprosy; La Villemarqué and Luzel had noted similar stories in their respective collections of Breton lays and legends, whilst Anatole Le Braz had also written a poem with the same title as Lazzari's opera.<sup>15</sup> The *gwerz*-like text of the poem, which recounts the tale of an innocent country girl who is infected with leprosy by a lord's son, elaborates the basic legend recorded by La Villemarqué and Luzel, but betrays no reluctance to examine the social or emotional consequences of the spread of a terminal and disfiguring infection, as the second and final stanzas demonstrate:

#### La Lépreuse

Un doux cavalier s'en vient d'aventure  
 Il a 'bonjouré' Monna Keryvel ;  
 C'est un fils de noble, à voir sa monture,  
 Et son parler fin sent l'odeur de miel.

Monna Keryvel de la Lande Haute,  
 Fais-toi belle et mets ta croix à ton cou ;  
 Un cavalier doux a grimpé la côte ...  
 Mais c'est l'épouseur des mortes, l'Ankou !<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Le Braz (1859–1926) was a significant figure in the literary renaissance of Brittany. His works inspired Ropartz and Lazzari's later opera *La Tour de feu* also draws on material from *Le Gardien du feu* (1900) by Le Braz.

<sup>16</sup> ['The Leper Girl  
 A handsome rider came along by chance  
 He hailed Monna Keryvel.  
 Judging by his steed, he was a lord's son,  
 And his fine speech wafted the scent of honey.

Monna Keryvel from the High Moor  
 Make yourself beautiful and put your cross around your neck  
 A gentle knight has climbed the slope  
 But this is the Ankou who assists at the weddings of the dead.']

Anatole Le Braz, 'La Lépreuse', *La Chanson de la Bretagne* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1901), pp. 90–2.

A comparison of the possible sources for Bataille's drama, and subsequently for the opera libretto, nevertheless reveals a range of narrative variants in the gendering of the leper, in the depiction of responses to infection and in the designation of the ultimate fate of the afflicted victims. In the truncated version of the story collected by La Villemarqué, it is thus the astute female protagonist who, in an implacable display of self-interested negation, rejects the advances of the stricken lover:

#### LA JEUNE FILLE

Jeune homme, vous en avez menti ! Je ne vous ai point donné mon cœur ;  
je ne veux plus de vous, vous êtes lépreux, je le sais bien.<sup>17</sup>

The task of reconstructing a partial, tenuous source which had only imperfectly survived through oral transmission was thus facilitated by its skeletal nature which allowed for amplification and manipulation in order to achieve and maintain a direct appeal to central hegemony whilst nonetheless retaining its regional authenticity.

Lazzari and Bataille, however, adopted controversial strategies which musically and dramatically reconstructed the available fragmentary evidence of the legend in such a way that both the opera and drama functioned allegorically. The extent to which the allegory was deciphered or interpreted ultimately governed critical responses to the work.

Reception of the work by Breton composers and critics apparently failed to register any embedded, subliminal social comment since, for those familiar with the legend of oral tradition and with the existing folk-tale collections, outrage at the extent of the

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<sup>17</sup> THE YOUNG GIRL

['Young man, you have lied about it! I most certainly never gave you my heart; I don't want anything more to do with you, you are a leper, I know it full well.']

La Villemarqué (2003), p. 465.



plagiarism employed by Bataille served to deflect attention from the additions to the original which were primed with cryptic signals of social malaise and cultural change. Indeed Luzel's brusque reaction to the suggestion that the legend could serve as the basis for a drama was echoed forcefully in the critical responses of Breton composers during February 1912, the month of the opera's première. Philippe le Stum has noted:

Tout le long du mois [...] *Comœdia* publiait une suite d'articles des compositeurs Ladmirault, Vuillemin, Duhamel, Laporte et Le Flem. Plus qu'à leur confrère Lazzari, ils s'en prenaient à l'auteur du livret, accusé d'avoir abusivement pillé le répertoire populaire collecté par La Villemarqué et Luzel, et de s'en être indûment attribué la paternité. La presse parisienne relaya la protestation des musiciens bretons, sur laquelle Pierre Lalo renchérit dans *Le Temps*.<sup>18</sup>

Bataille, however, had not only declared his intention to retain the original source in an unadulterated form, but had categorically stated that his intention towards the legend of the leper was 'Ne pas abîmer, mais non refaire.'<sup>19</sup> Citing the librettos of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and *The Flying Dutchman* as examples of 'criminal' interference in primitive folklore, the dramatist cast himself as a hero capable of maintaining within a contemporary work of art 'le grave enseignement de poésie et de vérité qui s'y cache [...] l'égalité des mots, des sentiments et des choses.'<sup>20</sup> Yet in his conscious mission to retain the essence of the folk legend, Bataille paradoxically instituted another of the polemics relating to the authenticity of erstwhile orally-

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<sup>18</sup> ['Throughout the month [...] *Comœdia* published a series of articles by the Breton composers Ladmirault, Vuillemin, Duhamel, Laporte and Le Flem. Rather than (opposing) their colleague Lazzari, they set themselves against the writer of the libretto, whom they accused of abusively pillaging the folk material, which La Villemarqué and Luzel had (previously) collected and published, and of undeservedly passing it off as his own. The Parisian press conveyed the protests of the Breton composers (and) Pierre Lalo (the son of the composer Édouard Lalo) supported their case in *Le Temps*.']

Philippe Le Stum, 'La Lépreuse' in *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* (1994), p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> ['Neither to lose completely, nor to refashion (the original legend).']

Bataille (1922), p. 273.

<sup>20</sup> ['... the serious teaching of poetry and the truth which is hidden within it [...] the equality of words, feelings and things.']

Ibid., p. 272.

transmitted material which have characterized the nineteenth-century revival of Breton culture. For Bataille seems to have adopted a particular 'cut and paste' method in the construction of the narrative; to this end he not only used those sections of the original *gwerz* which suited his artistic intent, but curiously appropriated sections from many of the other tales in Luzel's, La Villemarqué's and Le Braz's collections of folkloric material.

These random borrowings from unrelated stories were slotted in to the drama with varying degrees of success and compatibility. For example, as Ervoanik, the male protagonist, faces the leper's fate, a living death in which all normal social relations are forbidden, the pathos of his state is contained in the following speech which is faithfully reproduced in the opera libretto:

ERVOANIK

J'ai passé trois ans à l'école  
Mais maintenant je n'y retournerai plus.  
Dans un peu de temps je m'en irai encore loin du pays,  
Dans un peu de temps je serai mort,  
Et m'en irai en purgatoire.<sup>21</sup>

Ervoanik's tragic farewell represents a direct borrowing from the final speech of the male protagonist, Le Jeune Homme, in 'Le Lépreux', the related story in the *Barsaz Breiz* of La Villemarqué. However, whilst La Villemarqué's hero completes the legend with his anticipation of purgatory, Bataille saw fit to extend the heartrending valediction with the following words:

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<sup>21</sup> ['I have spent three years at school  
But now I will never return.  
In a short while I will go far from this land,  
In a short while I will be dead,  
And I will go away to Purgatory.']  
Bataille (1922), p. 105.

Et pendant ce temps mon moulin tournera,  
Diga-diga-di,  
Ah ! Mon moulin tournera,  
Diga-diga-da.<sup>22</sup>

Since Ervoanik, in Bataille's drama, is a farmer's son and the action of the first and third acts centres on the Breton farm which represents his future inheritance, the mention of the mill is disjunctive. The mechanisms that govern the suspension of disbelief allow, at least temporarily, for audience acceptance of the statement in accordance with the evident emotional turmoil of the protagonist, whose approaching demise has, perhaps, induced a re-evaluation of familiar landmarks. The alliterative refrain, 'Diga-diga-da', nevertheless has a dislocating effect at this, the gravest point in the dénouement. For the Breton cognoscenti, however, this inserted material would have been immediately identifiable as a fragment of the story which immediately succeeds 'Le Lépreux' in La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz*.

This brief, cynical tale, 'La Meunière de Pontaro' ('The Mill Girl of Pontaro'), which concerns the willing seduction of a village girl consequent upon the exercise of *le droit de seigneur* by the Baron of Pontaro, and which bears no narrative resemblance to the leper legend, contains the same refrain. The incompatibility of the borrowed fragment within the context of Bataille's drama seems, then, to exceed the mere task of the restoration of the legend which was Bataille's avowed artistic intent.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>['And all this time, my mill will keep on turning,  
Diga-diga-di,  
Ah, my mill will turn,  
Diga-diga-da.']

Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> The only difference is that the third line reads: 'Ah! mon moulin va.' [Ah! My mill will keep on going ...].

La Villemarqué (2003), pp. 466–78.

Reception of the opera libretto amongst Breton composers and critics was thus influenced by the perception of Bataille as a writer who had plundered the cherished works which had underpinned the cultural renaissance of the region for commercial gain. The polemic which surfaced at the time of the première is, indeed, credited by Mussat as the direct trigger for decisive rearguard action with consequences for the musical life of the region and for the promotion of the region in later lyrical works: 'les jeunes musiciens bretons eurent le sentiment d'avoir été dépossédés de leur patrimoine et décidèrent de réagir en créant une Association des Compositeurs Bretons (A.C.B).'<sup>24</sup> The debate was still vibrant decades later. In an article published in 1954, which noted the extent of Bataille's borrowings, Erwan Marec provided the following damning indictment:

Il existe un métier que les antiquaires parisiens connaissent bien, celui qui consiste, avec des fragments de tapisseries anciennes recueillies un peu partout et parfois disparates à les raccorder tant bien que mal au gré des couleurs et des dessins, comme en jeu de puzzle un peu moins précis et plus arbitraire, et à former ainsi des tapisseries nouvelles qui ont l'aspect des anciennes et qui peuvent passer, à des yeux insuffisamment avertis, pour des pièces originales. Or il apparaît bien qu'Henri Bataille, en composant sa *Lépreuse*, n'a guère fait autre chose que se métier habile de ravaudeur.<sup>25</sup>

In defining Bataille's narrative strategies as outright intellectual theft, Marec nevertheless fails to fully acknowledge the appeal of the work to central hegemony or

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<sup>24</sup> ['The young Breton musicians felt that they had been dispossessed of their birthright and decided to respond by forming the Association of Breton Composers.']

Marie-Claire Mussat, 'La Bretagne dans l'art lyrique', *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* (1994), p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> ['There is a particular skill which is well known to Parisian antique dealers and which consists of (taking) fragments of old tapestries collected from all over the place and often ill-assorted and of marrying them together, matching the colours and designs as well as is possible as if (they were parts of) an imprecise and rather inexact jigsaw puzzle and of thus constructing new tapestries which have the appearance of age and which, to untutored eyes, appear to be original pieces. Moreover, it seems that Henry Bataille, when he composed his *Lépreuse*, merely took on this role of skilful bodger.']

Erwan Marec, 'Les sources populaires bretonnes de *La Lépreuse* d'Henri Bataille', *Les Cahiers de l'Iroise*, July–September 1954, pp. 11–15.

the conscious innovation which underpinned the textual borrowings. Luzel's original tepid prognosis was, indeed, confounded when the drama inspired by the legend received its première in Paris in 1896. Although Bataille's earliest attempt to write for the stage, *La Belle au Bois Dormant*, had ended in failure, *La Lépreuse* was well received.<sup>26</sup> When the drama was premièred, it did so, moreover, under the auspices of the avant-garde, since Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Œuvre, which first staged the work as a benefit for Louise France, had a reputation for both symbolist and anarchistic leanings and was 'the most active and forward-looking in Paris'.<sup>27</sup> The original programme cover was designed by Toulouse Lautrec and stage designs were by Vuillard.

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<sup>26</sup> *La Belle au bois dormant* was staged by Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1894.

<sup>27</sup> Shattuck (1961), p. 203.



12: Toulouse Lautrec, 1896, *Programme for 'La Lépreuse'*, Lithograph in sepia.<sup>28</sup>



13: Édouard Vuillard, 1919, *Studio Interior: Model for the Scenery of La Lépreuse*, paint on card, private collection.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, 1963.30.107.



Notable literary avant-garde critics such as Catulle Mendès and Henry Bauer acclaimed the work and stressed the novelty of its poetic diction; Jules Lemaître, in addition, seemed to indicate the emergence of a new and telling art form that was:

[...] ni tout à fait pensée, ni tout à fait songe, produit dans une forme qui n'est tout à fait prose, ni tout à fait vers, ni tout à fait discours, ni tout à fait chanson, mousselines de vagues tristesses et de vague douceur.<sup>30</sup>

Bataille himself hinted at a symbolist agenda in the Preface to the first edition of the play:

Ces deux pièces parlent aussi des sens différents de la vie dans le Temps, du vieux mystère éternel de la Vie et de la Mort, de l'Amour et de la Haine.

Mais, très simples, ces pièces ne débattent ni n'arguent. Elles n'ont d'autre raison d'être que leur rêverie, d'autre philosophie que le charme d'une constatation et ce sont deux courts regards jetés sur les extrêmes de notre humanité.<sup>31</sup>

Equally, before staging the drama, he sought the advice of writers and critics associated with the symbolist school, most notably Jules Lemaître and Marcel Schwob, and later openly acknowledged the significance of their support: 'Il fallut [...] toute l'insistance de Marcel Schwob [...] pour me décider à donner *La Lépreuse* en représentation.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The post-impressionist Édouard Vuillard was closely associated with Lugné-Poe. However, the design was painted from memory in 1919.

<sup>30</sup> ['Neither precisely thought or dream, produced in a form which is neither prose nor verse, nor discourse nor song, delicate intimations of indistinct sadness and vague sweetness.']

J. Lemaître in 'Appendice', Bataille (1922), p. 275.

<sup>31</sup> ['These two plays (Bataille is referring to the companion piece, *I. Holocauste*, as well as to *La Lépreuse*) speak of the different meanings of existence throughout Time, of the old eternal mystery of Life and of Death, of Love and of Hate.']

['But these very simple works neither debate nor argue. They have no other reason for being than their dreaming, or other philosophy than the charm of an observation and they are two short looks at the extremes of our human existence.']

Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>32</sup> ['It took all of Marcel Schwob's insistence to persuade me to stage *La Lépreuse*.']

Ibid., p. 19.

However, recognition of the drama as essentially symbolist, whether expressed in the effulgent praise of critics or in the rationale of its creator, concealed an intransigent paradox. For the work evaded precise definition and its indefinable quality allowed it to become schismatic. The reception histories of the drama and the opera were markedly different and revealed the cultural divides which separated central and regional hegemonies; equally, critical evaluations of the work varied according to whether it was perceived as symbolist, as the original reviews suggested, or covertly realist, as the polemic instituted by the eventual attempts to stage the opera indicated. Comparisons of the reception histories of the drama and of the opera reveal, moreover, marked divisions between the social mores which informed the beginning of the Belle Époque and those which anticipated the advent of a new century. These divides, in turn, were modified or mediated by *fin-de-siècle* angst relating to current social discourses and gender-role perceptions.

In the concluding paragraph of his literary exegesis, Bataille nevertheless introduces an element of equivocation which demonstrates that, even at the time of the drama's première, he was aware of the stark potential of the work to be received as contemporary social commentary:

Plus le drame apparaît simple et dépourvu de haute signification, mieux le vrai but est atteint. Qu'importe si pensées, conceptions chères passent inaperçues ? Qu'importe si ce sont elles qui donnent au spectacle des choses et des êtres ce singulier attrait irrésistible de vérité et de vie profonde ?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ['The more simple and lacking in real significance that a play appears, the better the real aim is achieved. What does it matter if thoughts and cherished concepts pass unnoticed? What does it matter it is these which give the drama of (material) things and (living) beings the strange attraction of irresistible truth and inner life?']

Ibid., p. 276.

When, however, the composer Sylvio Lazzari, became interested in the drama in 1898 and ultimately adopted the work almost wholesale for the libretto of his opera of the same name, central hegemony, which had either ignored or tacitly approved the play in its symbolist guise, was apparently alerted to the '*haute signification*' at which Bataille had hinted. At first accepted for performance at the Opéra-Comique by the director Albert Carré, the process which should have brought the opera promptly to the Parisian stage was subjected to a variety of stalling devices aimed at avoiding an actual production; these attempts to halt the première not only culminated in a lengthy legal battle, which pitted Lazzari and Bataille against Carré, but also caused uproar within the Chamber of Deputies itself.<sup>34</sup>

These protracted, tortuous negotiations began with Carré's refusal to accept the title, *La Lépreuse*, and his request for a less offensive alternative; although, however, both Bataille and Lazzari were prepared to adopt the substitute title *La Sorcière*, later changed again to *L'Ensorcelée*, Carré's undertaking to include the opera in the 1901–2 season was not honoured.<sup>35</sup> The proposed title change would, in any event, have diminished the impact of the associations between the opera, its Breton roots and its avant-garde dramatic predecessor; it would equally have subtly shifted the dramatic focus away from the visibly untainted female protagonist, Aliette, to her hideous mother, La Vieille Tili, who conforms to the archetypal expectations of a

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<sup>34</sup> Carré provisionally agreed to add the work to the repertoire of the Opéra-Comique in 1900.

<sup>35</sup> *La Sorcière* (The Witch) was rejected as a possible title because of the existence of another work with the same name. Wolfgang Asholt identifies this as a Danish opera which had been successful in Copenhagen in 1898. Wolfgang Asholt, 'La Lépreuse von H. Bataille/S. Lazzari' in *Oper als Text: Romanistische Beiträge zur Libretto-Forschung* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1986), footnote, p. 303.

fairy-tale witch since she is first seen by the audience at the beginning of the second act whilst decoying the village children with deliberately infected sweetmeats.

Such a shift in emphasis appeared to answer Carré's request for a less distasteful title and would, perhaps, have been attractive to Bataille, given his liking for the genre of fairy-tale; however, at the same time, it drew attention to the particular character on stage who, in order for the dramatic action and the symbolic function of the drama to achieve maximum effect, was required to transmit the horror of moral and physical degeneration; La Vieille Tili, the instigator of the vengeful act of infection, needed to be visibly horrific, even if not accurately disfigured, in order for the future, grotesque fate of the central protagonists to be efficiently demonstrated. A title which directed attention to the demonic Tili as the main protagonist would not, then, have eliminated or reduced the 'unsavoury' impact of the original title.

However, although twenty-first century sensitivities might lead to a superficial interpretation of Carré's actions as a laudable empathy with disease-stricken, excluded social groups, the proceedings relating to the disputed contractual delays, which were flamboyantly played out in the courts and the House of Deputies, reveal a palpable social angst with implications not merely for the *fin de siècle* but also for contemporary society. Whilst Bataille's drama in its original form had been well received as symbolist theatre, the addition of music and the translation of the work to the lyrical stage seem to have permitted an uneasy symbolic decoding which was directly related to the additional material with which Bataille embellished his borrowings from accredited folkloric sources.

The narrative outline of the plot is almost directly taken from La Villemarqué's 'Argument' to 'Les Lépreux' in the *Barsaz Breiz*. In this preliminary exegesis, which precedes the main lament, *Ar C'hakous*, La Villemarqué establishes the historical context of leprosy in mediaeval Brittany and recounts those measures of social control that were adopted within communities in order to stem the tide of infection; in addition, he relates an unauthenticated version of a folk tale in which a beautiful young girl is rejected by her lover's family on the grounds that she has been tainted by leprosy. At the beginning of her encounter with her betrothed's family, she peremptorily demands 'Donnez-moi un siège pour m'asseoir, et un linge pour m'essuyer le front, car votre fils m'a promis de me prendre pour femme.'<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Bataille's heroine confronts the farmer, Matelinn, with the words 'Donnez-moi un escabeau pour m'asseoir, si je dois être belle fille dans cette maison.'<sup>37</sup> Aliette, the central female protagonist in *La Lépreuse*, is thus modelled closely on the legendary Marie and the resemblance is further confirmed by the calamitous consequences which are unleashed in both versions in true Greek tragic fashion as an inevitable response to those social mechanisms which marginalize and exclude the 'other', the infected minority. Marie, driven from the family hearth which represents bourgeois cultural norms and established social mores, subsequently retaliates:

Marie sort en pleurant et jure de se venger. En effet, elle se fend un doigt, et avec son sang elle donne la lèpre à quatorze personnes de la famille qui l'a repoussée, et son jeune amoureux en meurt.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ['Give me a chair to sit on and linen to wipe my brow, for your son has promised to take me as his wife.']

La Villemarqué (2003), p. 464.

<sup>37</sup> ['Give me a stool to sit on, since I am going to be the daughter-in-law of the house.']

Bataille (1922), p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> ['Marie leaves in tears and vows to take revenge. In effect, she cuts her own finger and transmits leprosy with her blood to fourteen members of the family which rejected her, and her young lover dies of it.']

La Villemarqué (2003), p. 464.

This crime, the deliberate infliction of ‘biological grievous bodily harm’, is also central to *La Lépreuse*; however, La Villemarqué’s skeleton narrative was subtly manipulated in the reworking to which it was subjected by Bataille. Aliette, the female protagonist, does indeed declare ‘D’une goutte de sang de ce petit doigt, j’en tuerais cent, j’en tuerais mille’,<sup>39</sup> thereby augmenting the envisaged pool of infection; nevertheless, her operatic soliloquy also includes the disturbing revelation that ‘J’ai aimé dix-huit innocents, et je leur ai donné la lèpre à tous.’<sup>40</sup> Bataille, then, who had assiduously sought to retain regional authenticity by the rapacious, verbatim plagiarism of Breton folk-lore, significantly elected to introduce original narrative material in such a way that the act of physical love was linked to the transmission of infection and that the consequences of lost sexual innocence were defined as of epidemic proportions.

That the significance of Bataille’s modifications was noted at the time of the disputes concerning the staging of Lazzari’s opera is evident from the exchanges that took place in the National Assembly. In the theatre of central political power, the issue of Carré’s reluctance to honour his contractual obligations was, ostensibly, legitimately debated since the Opéra-Comique was state-subsidised; nevertheless, the feverish wrangling indicates an unease which extended well beyond concern for the cultural budget. The deputy Jumel (Landes), in his defence of Carré and in an attempt to ridicule the libretto, cited particular speeches directly; however, these passages not only foregrounded Bataille’s textual additions, but also contained the precise key to

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<sup>39</sup> [‘With one drop of blood from this little finger I would kill a hundred, I would kill a thousand.’]

<sup>40</sup> [‘I have loved eighteen innocent men and I have given them all leprosy.’]

Bataille (1922), p. 72.



the allegorical content of the entire work. Thus Aliette's declaration of the epidemic transmission of infection to eighteen innocent men figured significantly, as did the following subversive innuendo uttered by la Vieille Tili:

Songe donc à cette joie; te venger en aimant,  
donner la mort dans la joie,  
donner la mort, sans le couteau.<sup>41</sup>

Wolfgang Asholt, in a study which examines reception of the *La Lépreuse*, rightly draws attention to the fact that Jumel's discourse exposed the latent symbolism within the work and to the fact that the underlying sexual content was thereby paraded for central hegemony in such a way that it could no longer be ignored:

Diese sexuelle Komponente stellt vermutlich den eigentlichen Ablehnungsgrund dar, ansonsten hätten Carré/Jumel es nicht für nötig gehalten, sie durch die erwähnten Zusätze besonders zu betonen.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, Asholt notes that Jumel made a direct connection between Aliette's vengeance, promiscuity and the transmission of syphilis:

[...] elle prend plaisir à distribuer son mal aux jeunes gens qu'elle rencontre, non plus avec une tartine, comme fait sa grand'mère, mais de façon plus certaine.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, although Asholt's commentary acknowledges the menace of syphilis as the likely reason for Jumel's disdain and Carré's rejection of the opera, it does not provide a complete interrogation of the impact of the allegorical interpretation which

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<sup>41</sup> ['Think about this (particular) pleasure: getting your revenge through love itself, meting out death with joy, bringing death without the knife.']

Bataille (1922), p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> ['The sexual content was supposedly the main reason for the rejection (of the opera), since otherwise Carré and Jumel would not have found it necessary to emphasize it by quoting the said extracts.'] Asholt (1986), p. 310.

<sup>43</sup> ['She takes pleasure in passing on her affliction to the young men she encounters, not just by (sharing) a slice of bread, as her grandmother does, but by more certain means.'] Ibid., p. 310.

Jumel promoted. Fear of leprosy was historically deeply rooted within European consciousness and the disease had traditionally been perceived as visible proof of 'the wages of sin' which inevitably punished innocent, succeeding generations. Moreover, the disfigurement which is symptomatic of the disease had always suggested, to less medically-informed minds, and before the advent of modern pathology, a direct parallel with the physical degeneration of sexually transmitted disease; the link between leprosy and sexual promiscuity was ancient and unquestioned. As Allen has noted:

[...] lepers haunted the European memory long after the disease had died out in most parts of Europe. To be a leper was the most loathsome and fearful torment that could be imagined, and to be treated like one the greatest punishment that society could inflict. The tie between leprosy and sexual sin remained strong: the immensely popular Catholic preacher Michel Menot (ca. 1440–1518) would describe syphilitics as 'leprous and stinking'; so would John Calvin.<sup>44</sup>

Lazzari and Bataille thus exploited a powerful, established metaphor which invested the opera with the weight of social discourse; this discourse, moreover, echoed contemporary, punitive social theories relating to the control of prostitution and augmented the formidable arsenal of those medical terrorists who sought to disseminate awareness of the terrifying consequences of syphilis. It is inconceivable that the choice of subject arose merely from the random appropriation of folklore and, indeed, additions to the original Breton folktale introduced by both librettist and composer indicate the extent to which the allegorical potential of the story of the leper girl was developed to reflect contemporary social debates aimed at the reinforcement

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 40.

of monogamy as a defence against venereal infection. In *La Lépreuse*, Breton folk material was uniquely refigured in the pursuit of an interventionist agenda.

Throughout the libretto, there are thus frequent references to the '*maisons blanches*' and the '*maisons neuves*', the 'white houses' or 'new houses' which constitute the leper dwellings beyond the village boundaries. Ervoanik, having acknowledged that he has been infected with leprosy during his liaison with Aliette, makes the following heartfelt plea to his mother:

ERVOANIK

Mais si plus tard, vous me faites bâtir  
une maison blanche pour moi seul,  
qu'on la bâtit sur la lande du Klandi,  
pour que je vois les pèlerins  
qui se rendent, au mois de mai, au Guéodet [...].<sup>45</sup>

The 'white house' was Bataille's own invention; in La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz*, the demonstrable narrative source of the libretto, the leper houses are described merely as 'des demeures à l'écart'.<sup>46</sup> The additional adjective invests the dwelling with particular significance; although, superficially, it represents isolation, the enforced and permanent quarantine of the diseased for the efficient protection of society at large, it also stands as an efficient, subliminal reminder of official strategies aimed at the effective control of prostitution.

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<sup>45</sup> ['But if later, you build me  
a white house, just for me,  
you should build it on the heath at Klandi,  
so that I can see the pilgrims  
who go, in May, to Guéodet.']

Bataille (1922), p. 106.

<sup>46</sup> ['Isolated dwellings.']

La Villemarqué (2003), p. 463.

During the nineteenth century, indeed, such strategies in France emphasized the need to exercise tolerance based on scientific, Enlightenment reason, but also demanded rigid surveillance and regulation, by separation, of a profession which, by its nature, functioned on the margins of society. The seminal study of Parisian prostitution by the social hygienist Parent-Duchâtelet in 1836 had noted that ‘les prostituées sont aussi inévitables, dans une agglomération d’hommes, que les égouts, les voiries et les dépôts d’immondices.’<sup>47</sup> However, in the interests of maintaining public hygiene, Parent-Duchâtelet, whose study informed the later *réglimentariste* discourses of the *fin de siècle*, directed the isolation and confinement of the prostitute within a building set apart, the ‘*maison de tolérance*’ or ‘*maison close*’,<sup>48</sup> which would be:

[...] un *milieu clos* invisible des enfants, des filles et des femmes honnêtes ; la clôture permet de marginaliser à l’extrême, de *contenir* les activités sexuelles extra-conjugales; elle constitue une digue qui empêche tout débordement.<sup>49</sup>

The *maisons closes* of nineteenth-century Paris thus performed the same paradoxical social function as the leper dwellings in actual mediaeval society and within the narratives of La Villemarqué and Bataille. The ‘white houses’ in the opera contain the infection on the margins of the village and yet remain invisible to the eyes of both audience and protagonists. The production book for *La Lépreuse* significantly provides precise on-stage locations for Matelinn’s farm, for the *lavoir* (washing place) and for the church and village; however, the leper hamlet is notably absent and,

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<sup>47</sup> [‘Prostitutes are as inevitable, where men are gathered, as sewers, cesspits and rubbish dumps.’] Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, 2 vols (Paris: Baillière, 1836), II, 513.

<sup>48</sup> [‘Tolerance house’] or [‘closed house.’] The terms are euphemisms for the brothel.

<sup>49</sup> [‘... an enclosed space invisible to children, girls and honest women; the enclosure allows for the marginalization of the prostitute on the extreme edges (of society), for the containment of extra-marital sexual activity; it constitutes a dyke which prevents any overflow (of contamination).’] Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce : Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), p. 24.

indeed was omitted even from the backdrop for the première. The ‘white houses’ fulfil their social and dramatic function only by being ascribed a location beyond the imagined horizon; they literally ‘whitewash’ the threat by rendering it invisible and yet must retain their menace in order to safeguard the populace from the recondite and contaminating existence within their walls.

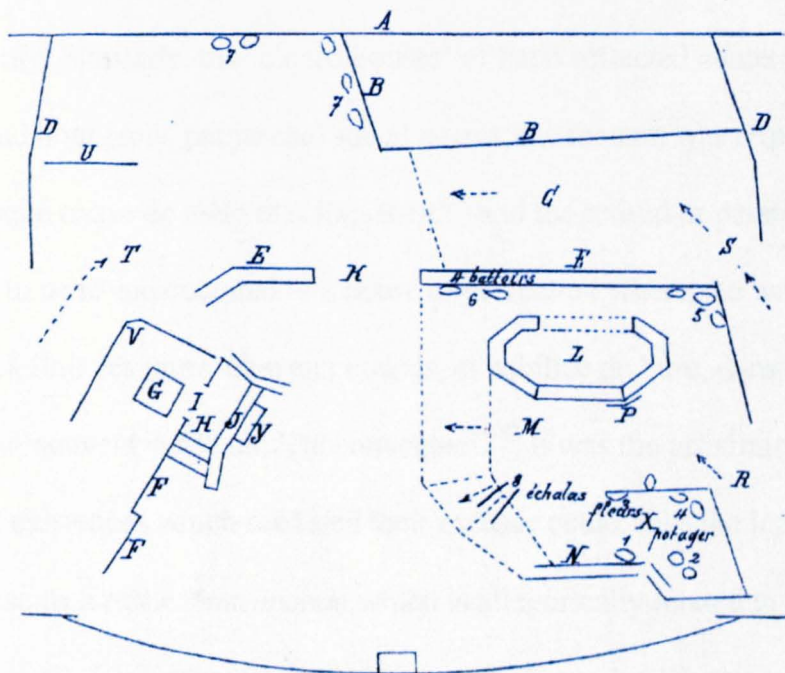


14: Bailly’s sketch for the stage design (Act I) of *La Lépreuse*. The farmhouse is on the left and the washing place on the right behind the trees; the sketch reflects the stage plan shown in the production book (Figure 15).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Albert Bertelin, ‘*La Lépreuse*’, *Comœdia Illustré*, 4 (1912), p. 394.



1<sup>er</sup> Acte.



- A. Fond de Collines, à droite l'Eglise.
- B Petit terrain de Maisons.
- C Praticable en pente.
- D Panorama au rixdau.
- E Mue avec éboulis. Hauteur 1<sup>re</sup> 60 environ.
- F Maison rustique avec :
- G Lucarne praticable au dessus.
- H Localité d'accès avec perron.
- I Porte
- J Mue de l'escalier
- K Porte à 2 vantaux, donnant sur la route.
- L Lavoie avec petit mue bas, dans lequel sont ménagés des baises pour l'emplacement des lavoirs.
- M Grand praticable.
- N Petit mue de 0,60 en ruines
- O Chassis, d'arbres.
- P Chassis formant puits.
- R. S. T. - Issues.

- U Chaisie d'arbres.  
V Fond d'intérieur.  
X Petit parterre de fleurs, potager.  
Y Petite construction en pierre for-  
mant banc pour s'asseoir.

- 1 Plateau de fougères.
- 2 Petite arbutus.
- 3 Plateaux de fleurs avec petite bouquet pouvant se détacher (thym et marjolaine).
- 4 Quelques choux plantés.
- 5 Gaieté.
- 6 Fleurs.
- 7 Gaieté.
- 8 Echelles à terre.

Dans la maison: 1 paquet de  
linge, 5 morceaux de savon.

Couloir : 2 papiers et 2 paquets  
de linge, dans lesquels se trouvent :  
4 Enlisseurs bleus.  
4. Balloires sur le mur E, côté cour.

15: Production Book for *La Lépreuse*: Stage design for Act I.  
(Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, Département de la musique, Vmb. 4267, p. 1)



The lurking, off-stage presence of the leper settlement is, moreover, infinitely psychologically destabilizing because it represents a parallel, mirror-image of normality where life, for the diseased minority, echoes the mundane existence of the healthy majority. Similarly, the ‘closed houses’ of Paris reflected contemporary class hierarchies and bourgeois, patriarchal social norms; the madam was required to possess ‘quelque chose de mâle et d’imposant’<sup>51</sup> and the retired or penitent prostitute could expect to be re-incarcerated in a house of correction where she would be: ‘Condamnée à finir ses jours, cheveux coupés, et habillée de bure, dans des maisons établies le plus souvent sur le modèle conventuel.’<sup>52</sup> It was the proximity, then, of these inverse existences which rendered their menace acute; thus the leper colony in the opera presents a rustic *demi-monde* which is allegorically related to its marginal, Parisian *fin-de-siècle* counterpart. References to the leper dwellings occur regularly within the libretto and the adjective ‘white’ is deployed constantly so that, subliminally, the threat of degenerative decay on the social margins is omnipresent.

In addition to the containment and surveillance of contagion, these dwellings represent the punitive response of society towards the afflicted, as the Sénéchal’s warning to La Vieille Tili succinctly reveals:

SÉNÉCHAL  
 Donc, si une fois encore, ceux d’ici  
 m’envoient dire que leurs enfants  
 mangent le pain mordu des lépreux  
 votre ménage sera fait une fois pour toutes

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<sup>51</sup> [‘Something masculine and imposing (about her).’]  
 Parent-Duchâtelet (1836), I, 429–30.

<sup>52</sup> [‘Condemned to end her days shorn, dressed in a habit, in houses (of correction) modelled on convents.’]  
 Corbin (1982), p. 32.

et vous serez conduite en maison blanche.<sup>53</sup>

Again, the allegorical function of the dramatic action emerges not merely from the portrayal of a mediaeval mindset which conflated disease in general, and leprosy in particular, with the judgement of God upon the sinful, but also from those nineteenth-century French discourses which identified the female prostitute, rather than her male client, as the epitome of sexual incontinence and therefore as the repository of syphilitic infection. Attempts to contain and control the whore, moreover, judicially punished female sexuality.

Parent-Duchâtelet thus fearfully acknowledged that prostitutes constituted an ever-present danger: 'Elles rentrent dans le monde [...] elles nous entourent [...] elles nous pénètrent dans nos maisons, dans nos intérieurs.'<sup>54</sup> A similar hysterical response is evident in *La Lépreuse* when Aliette makes her first entry and encounters Matelinn, Ervoanik's father, within the conventional, patriarchal domicile; Matelinn is clearly alert to the nature of the menace which Aliette poses and signals recognition in a way which immediately recalls Parent-Duchâtelet's association of the body of the whore with the detritus of the gutter:

#### MATELINN

Je me moque autant de vous  
que de la boue de mes souliers, —  
et je le répète, sorcière impure,  
tu as la peste apostumée dans l'épaule.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> ['So, if the people hereabouts inform me once more that their children are eating bread that lepers have chewed, your living arrangements will be sorted out once and for all and you will be sent to a white house.'] Bataille (1922), pp. 59–60.

<sup>54</sup> ['They go back into the world [...] they are all around us [...] they penetrate our houses, our homes.']

Parent-Duchâtelet (1836), II, 41.

<sup>55</sup> ['I think about as much of your sort

There is, moreover, little doubt about the true identity of Aliette. In the first scene, her social and medical status is established before her physical entrance onstage since the first *lavandière* (washerwoman) declares:

PREMIÈRE LAVANDIÈRE

Tous les lépreux ne sont pas sur la montagne  
dans les maisons neuves  
peintes en blanc qu'on leur bâtit, —  
et j'en sais, comme Aliette Tili  
qui vont à pied à Ploumillau.<sup>56</sup>

Aliette's potential menace thus derives from the fact that she has evaded confinement within the marginal, invisible leper colony. She operates freely within village society, challenges accepted class and gender roles, evades patriarchal social controls and transmits deadly infection even as she loves. She thus represents that most dreaded of figures within socio-medical discourses of the nineteenth century, the clandestine whore.

Within such discourses, the role of the prostitute was ascribed its own hierarchy governed as much by the willingness to submit to forensic and judicial controls as by catchment or clientele; the establishment of strictly defined orders within the profession was, moreover, directed not merely by the obvious, precautionary containment of infection, but also by the need to punish illicit sexual activity. The lowest ranking prostitutes, who were defined as *filles soumises* and who were police

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as I do of the mud on my shoes, —  
and I say again, impure witch,  
you bear the dread plague upon your shoulders.' ]

Bataille (1922), p.45.

<sup>56</sup> ['All the lepers are not on the mountain  
in the new, white houses  
which have been built for them, —  
and I know some, such as Aliette Tili,  
who are going to Ploumillau (to the religious *Pardon*) on foot.']

Bataille (1922), p. 28.

registered, restricted within the 'closed house' of the designated brothel and subject to regular health checks, represented a reduced menace. At the other end of the scale, the highest ranking courtesans, the *grandes horizontales*, were highly visible and yet operated within an elite and affluent clientele; their potential threat to society at large was thus minimal. However, unregulated groups of women who provided sexual services and yet operated beyond these strictly contained limits were perceived to be perilously shifty, capable of destabilizing society and even a potential threat to national security and ethnic survival.

The dangers of clandestine prostitution were recognized by Parent-Duchâtelet who accused the *insoumises* of 'assuming the most proper appearance' and added that they 'paralyze authority, defy it at every instant and spread with impunity the most awful contagion and the greatest immorality.'<sup>57</sup> Yet such fears were sharply augmented in the aftermath of the Commune and were at their most intense at the *fin de siècle*.

Aliette conforms precisely to the paradigm of the clandestine whore whose unruly force and errant moral path defy containment. Her revenge, moreover, represents yet another manipulation of the folkloric source of the libretto; La Villemarqué describes the act of vengeance of the female protagonist in the original Breton legend as the straightforward infliction of bodily harm on members of the bourgeois family who have rejected her. Bataille, however, repeatedly affirms that Aliette has an established history of wanton amatory adventures which have compromised the health of a succession of partners. Aliette is described by her own mother as not eligible for

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<sup>57</sup> Parent-Duchâtelet (1836), I, 499.

marriage because she is ‘la belle brûleuse de bouches’<sup>58</sup> and is greeted on her arrival at la Vieille Tili’s house with the invitation:

VIEILLE TILI

Oui donc, arrêtez-vous chez moi aujourd’hui,  
vous et l’amoureux qui passe,  
celui d’aujourd’hui, celui de demain.<sup>59</sup>

Aliette’s sexual conduct clearly conforms to the model of the clandestine *fille insoumise*; however she also demonstrates those stereotypical characteristics assigned to the prostitute by contemporary medical discourses and literature. Corbin notes that Parent-Duchâtelet recorded a tendency for fallen women to be immature, sentimentally moved by religious piety, intemperate in the expression of romantic love, to be apparently healthy yet capable of transmitting infection and to have emerged, congenitally suspect, from ‘une origine ignoble’.<sup>60</sup> Aliette is similarly dominated by her mother, insists on attendance at the religious procession, the *Pardon*, and demonstrates a morbid fascination with religious symbols; her infected status is invisible and she deliberately infects Ervoanik in an immoderate response to the malicious, but unfounded suggestion that he has concealed an earlier romantic attachment. The presence of La Vieille Tili in the central act of the opera, moreover, functions as a terrifying reminder of Aliette’s genetic inheritance.

Although the stage and costume designs avoided accurate manifestations of leprous deformity, Aliette’s mother was, as the publicity photographs taken for the première

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<sup>58</sup> [‘The lovely mouth-scorcher.’]

<sup>59</sup> [‘Yes, alright, stay with me today,  
you and your passing flame,  
today’s lover, or tomorrow’s.’]

Bataille (1922), p. 64.

<sup>60</sup> Corbin (1982), pp. 190–230.

reveal, a hideously terrifying presence on stage.<sup>61</sup> The critic Albert Bertelin commented that although Tili does not bear the stigmata of disease she is nevertheless ‘Victime de l’affreuse maladie qu’elle hérita de ses ancêtres’.<sup>62</sup> Aliette’s genetic taint and capacity for epidemic transmission of infection, not merely as an isolated act of ‘grievous biological harm’, but also as the potential destruction of an entire bloodline, were thus evidently accessible to contemporary critics at the time of the first performance. The full force of her menace relates not merely to the medieval setting of the drama, therefore, but equally to nineteenth-century social angst and misogyny.

Ervoanik, the male protagonist, is the only son of respectable, rural bourgeois stock; the prosperous farm which bustles in the background of the two outer acts is his rightful inheritance by primogeniture. His relationship with the leper girl thus threatens his personal health and survival but equally menaces notions of bourgeois stability based on economic prosperity and the bequest of a secure patrimony. It is no accident that the most virulent and violent expressions of hatred directed at the unfortunate Aliette issue from the patriarchal figure of Matelinn, Ervoanik’s father, nor that the latter’s intransigent ire demonstrates concern for posterity via the male bloodline rather than any affront at the challenge to the moral or physical health of his wife and daughters who are also present:

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<sup>61</sup> Costume designs were by Marcel Mültzer (1866–1937). Associated with the Opéra-Comique for forty years, he also designed the costumes for Lazzari’s *Sauteriot* (1920).

<sup>62</sup> [‘A victim of the hideous disease which she has inherited from her forbears.’] *Cœmædia Illustré*, 4 (1912), p. 394.





16: Marie Delna as Tili, *Comædia Illustré*, 4 (1912)

## MATELINN

Voleuse de fils, je te ferai pendre !  
 Qu'on tranche la tête de ces femmes  
 qui font les vampires sur nos fils,  
 et qu'on la jette dans la rue,  
 aux enfants, pour jouer à la crosse !<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> ['Son filcher, I'll have you hung!  
 May the heads of these women  
 who suck our sons' blood like vampires,  
 be severed and thrown into the street  
 for the children to play hockey with!']  
 Bataille (1922), pp. 45–6.

The central metaphor of the vampire which informs this hysterical tirade demonstrates the patriarch's instinctive response to protect the biological purity of his own genetic legacy. Dijkstra, moreover, identifies the figure of the vampire as a common and accessible trope for the predatory whore in nineteenth-century literature and art:

By 1900 the vampire had come to represent woman as the personification of everything negative that linked sex, ownership and money. She symbolized the sterile hunger for seed of the brainless, instinctually polyandrous — even if still virginal — child-woman. She also came to represent the equally sterile lust for gold of woman as the eternal polyandrous prostitute.<sup>64</sup>

Matelinn's aggressive and unequivocal reaction to Aliette at her first appearance thus sustains Bernheimer's assertion that the prostitute in nineteenth century French literature evoked and encoded specific castration phobias:

[The prostitute] asserts her independence of the male plot at the very moment when the male thinks he is inscribing her body into it. This assertion, which stimulates narratively productive castration fears, becomes the object of complex strategies designed to put these fears to rest and achieve narrative closure.<sup>65</sup>

Although the supposed victim of the putative, symbolic castration, Ervoanik, is oblivious to pathogenic menace, the evocation of terror by proxy is nonetheless telling. Matelinn's angst reflects, moreover, contemporary French medical discourses which disseminated the perception of syphilis as a modern, abhorrent plague, distributed throughout the population in epidemic proportions and capable, by hereditary transmission, of effecting a significant diminution in the birth rate of

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<sup>64</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 351.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 88.

healthy infants and a consequent fall in the numbers of vigorous young men available to defend the nation. The years during which Carré resisted all attempts to stage the opera were also marked by widespread recognition of venereal peril and by 'medical terrorism'<sup>66</sup> designed to combat the perceived threat. Corbin notes the proliferation of *fin-de-siècle* medical treatises which identified the potential pathological threat, of which the following example is typical:

En 1889 déjà, le docteur Le Pileur affirmait que sur 'cent enfants conçus à Paris, treize périraient par la fait de la syphilis de leur mère'.<sup>67</sup>

He further acknowledges:

Surtout l'immense succès que remporte, au sein du corps médical, la notion d'*hérédosyphilis* touche au plus profond une opinion hantée par la crainte de la dégénérescence. A la suite des travaux d'Édmond Fournier [...], l'existence de la dégénérescence syphilitique est reconnue par beaucoup comme vérité incontestable. On en vient à lui attribuer presque toutes les malformations, presque toutes les monstruosités; c'est l'âge d'or de la tératologie syphilitique.<sup>68</sup>

When Aliette's mother Tili concludes the second act with her invitation to Ervoanik to partake of the tainted drink, sung to the words 'ceci est mon sang' ('this is my blood'), her offer is infused, therefore, with a significance which extends beyond the obvious blasphemy; the reference to her 'blood' can be interpreted as a secular omen of racial degeneration.

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<sup>66</sup> I.e.: Attempts to induce the avoidance of sexual activity by associating it with fearful menace.

<sup>67</sup> ['By 1889, the doctor Le Pileur confirmed that thirteen out of every hundred children conceived in Paris would die as a result of syphilis passed on by their mother.']

<sup>68</sup> ['Above all, the huge success felt at the heart of the medical community by the (recognition of the) notion of hereditary syphilis, impacted, at the deepest level, on public opinion which was already haunted by the fear of (racial) degeneracy. Subsequent to the works of Edmond Fournier, the existence of syphilitic degeneracy was recognized by many as an incontestable truth. Almost all malformations, almost all deformities came to be attributed to it; it was the golden age of the study of syphilitic abnormalities.']

Corbin (1982), p. 387.

Yet if Aliette represents a genetic threat to posterity, her menace is also reinforced by her rejection of established class hierarchies; moreover her challenge to bourgeois social codes is immediate and explicit since she possesses the talent for social mobility of the skilled *déclassée demi-mondaine*. Her demand for recognition and status within Matelinn's household, evident in her peremptory request for a place at the hearth, constitutes an act of transient rooting intended for formal and permanent ratification through marriage; it is arguably an insolent and clearly articulated attempted erosion of class boundaries. Tili, indeed, reminds Aliette that a marriage with Ervoanik will breach social divides 'Vous, prendre époux, la fille aux liards !' and insists that an informal liaison might be preferable.<sup>69</sup> The leper girl, moreover, has no defined social status since her father resides within the enclosed colony of white houses and her mother exists only on the margins of the village community; her occupation is never indicated and her only pastime in the libretto narrative is the serial pursuit of young men for the purposes of transmitting infection and for the fulfilment of Tili's antisocial vengeance.

Aliette's ability to traverse social divides augments the potential menace which she embodies; like Bizet's Carmen, she does not respond conventionally to social cues and jettisons proletarian mores in the wilful pursuit of her own desires. However, her seductive power and aspiration to social mobility are reflected more in her ability to project, through her actual and musical languages, a multiplicity of gender roles. As the opera progresses, she sings variously as an innocent child, as a dutiful daughter, as lover and whore and as reformed penitent; whilst her shifting identity is always a

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<sup>69</sup> ['You, take a husband, the girl with only two farthings to rub together!'] Bataille (1922), p. 76.

harbinger of danger, she is nevertheless the most rounded and complex of the female protagonists who are considered in this study.

The conflation of leprosy, sexual transgression and syphilis, historically established and reflected in nineteenth-century narratives and contemporary medical discourses is thus a recurring and consistent subtext of the dramatic action in *La Lépreuse*; this subtext is rendered accessible by the presentation of Aliette as paradigmatic of the clandestine *fille insoumise*. Nevertheless, the work is problematic since the desired narrative closure is never achieved. Bernheimer suggests that:

In the Romantic literary tradition from Rousseau through Sue,<sup>70</sup> the figure of the reformed prostitute is plotted to support a conservative patriarchal ideology. The destabilizing force of the prostitute's erotic body can be safely evoked, if only in disguised or displaced manner, because the narration is structured to contain and discipline her unruly energy. The loving prostitute exemplifies the renunciation of a predatory female sexuality in submission to paternal Law.<sup>71</sup>

Whilst Aliette does, in the opera, ultimately submit to patriarchal authority, and whilst her menace is finally contained when she accompanies the infected Ervoanik to the white houses in an act of loving, redemptive sacrifice, full narrative closure is denied. The fears evoked by Aliette's erotic and contaminating presence are not laid to rest by the dénouement of the plot; they are, conversely, amplified. The entire final act is a harrowing, symbolic castration in which Ervoanik is ritually ejected from the 'living' community of the village and translated to the leper colony; any further interaction with normal life is forbidden and the termination of his genetic legacy is affirmed by the process of severance from his erstwhile life. Faced with the extremity

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<sup>70</sup> Eugène Sue, *Les mystères de Paris* (1842-3). The female protagonist in this, his most famous novel, is Fleur-de-Marie, a reformed prostitute.

<sup>71</sup> Bernheimer (1989), p. 52.

of the situation, 'paternal Law', personified by Matelinn, is annihilated and he is reduced to a last, invective flurry against Aliette; it is, moreover, the victim's mother, Maria, who sustains Ervoanik in the final moments of his agony.

Seen in the climate of 'medical terrorism' and the syphilophobia which pertained at the time when Carré deployed repeated strategies to omit *La Lépreuse* from his programming, his fears relating to the suitability of the subject for the Opéra-Comique stage are understandable. The social function of that particular opera venue, traditionally associated with the bourgeois marriage market, made it an unlikely setting for a contentious work in which normative morality is repeatedly subverted; moreover, once the processes of rejection and judicial challenge were underway, central hegemony could not ignore the symbolic decoding of the opera which had been obligingly, if theatrically and inaccurately facilitated at the heart of government in the Assembly itself. Nevertheless, the project ultimately came to fruition and the remarkable *volte face* which enabled the first performance to take place presents an apparent enigma.

Asholt adopts Adorno's recognition of a shift in the social function of opera at the turn of the nineteenth century to explain the changed circumstances which cleared the route to performance;<sup>72</sup> this shift, he argues, framed the increasing redundancy of the need to look back nostalgically on a golden past securely rooted in the bourgeois values which had characterized cultural hegemony at the *fin de siècle*. However, reviews of the première seem to indicate that the symbolic currency of the libretto was no longer 'legal tender' by 1912. A more plausible explanation for this apparent

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<sup>72</sup> Asholt (1986), p. 299.



failure to register the innate symbolism of *La Lépreuse* relates to its context within the history of medicine. Quite simply, the years between the opera's rejection by Carré and its first performance in 1912 were the years in which those medical advances occurred which defused the menace of syphilis; the specific bacterium was isolated by Hoffmann and Schaudin in 1905, Wassermann produced the test enabling prompt diagnosis of the disease in 1906 and the Nobel Prize winner Paul Ehrlich pioneered the scientific use of the arsenical compound Salvarsan as a cure in 1910. The dilution of the 'terrorist' manifesto thus arguably allowed for the specific symbolic content of the opera to be reduced to a general and less morbid level.

The years between the first performance of Bataille's drama and the première of Lazzari's opera nevertheless demonstrated polarized responses to the symbolic content of the work which cannot wholly be attributed to contemporary medical discourses. Although initial acceptance of the dramatic work can be explained in terms of its bohemian, avant-garde audience, Carré's persistent disdain for the subject matter of the opera seems to credit any potential Opéra-Comique audience with the capacity to interpret the subtext of the plot. Yet, as the composer Bruneau noted, Parisian audiences were renowned for their inability to heed the words of libretti; he estimated that a mere tenth of Wagner's *Siegfried* was accessible to Opéra audiences even when a vernacular libretto was provided.<sup>73</sup> André Spies, moreover, suggests that French opera during the Third Republic served dominant hegemonic elites to the extent that conscious assimilation and identification of ideological opera content bypassed the conventional audiences whose values it promoted:

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<sup>73</sup> Cited in Spies (1998), p. 3.

This self-serving self-deception could be maintained because the implicit messages in apparently uncontroversial, aesthetically pleasing operas appeared to be ideologically neutral — that is, they reproduced the prejudices of the dominant groups.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, Carré's refusal of the opera indicates either that the didactic content of *La Lépreuse* was sufficiently transparent at the *fin de siècle* for the libretto to breach the self-deceiving mechanisms of Opéra-Comique audiences, or that genre transfer of the work to the lyrical stage, and the addition of detailed costume, stage settings and music, in some way facilitated the erosion of those cultural devices designed to unequivocally promote the values of central hegemony. The role, then, of music itself in facilitating the transmission of the grisly social message was crucial.

### **Musical themes and their Breton Literary and Iconographical Inspirations**

Erin Williams Hyman has noted that productions at Lugné Poe's Théâtre de l'Œuvre, the theatre which launched Bataille's original drama, were informed by a social context of public hysteria consequent upon the 'propaganda by deed' which brought terror to the streets of Paris in the 1890s; she notes that the dramas relied on: 'a focus on gesture which [...] is tied to the Symbolist fascination for anarchist theories of action' and acknowledges that: 'The *attentat* (attack) became the Symbolist spectacle par excellence, an act whose polysemic *éclat* made it the model for a kind of theatrical terror.'<sup>75</sup> Bataille's libretto, whilst not narratively concerned with an actual armed attack, nevertheless follows that trend by manipulating a tragic Breton legend

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Erin Williams Hyman, 'Theatrical Terror: *Attentats* and Symbolist Spectacle', *The Comparatist*, 29, (2005), pp. 101–122.

to transmit a persistent medical terrorist manifesto; Lazzari's score for *La Lépreuse*, however, subjected the audience to a cumulative and sustained 'attental' that maximized the evocation of terror and invested it with additional layers of 'polysemic significance'.

The initial reception of Lazzari's score was favourable. Although contemporary reviews noted the inclusion of folk tunes, they nonetheless failed to identify the borrowings precisely or to reveal the extent to which composer and librettist were in synthesis in their recourse to specific, regional narratives and musical traditions. The critic Louis Vuillemin,<sup>76</sup> thus wrote in *Comœdia*:

Vous auriez tort d'en conclure que le musicien, ayant conçu la partition de *La Lépreuse* au pays d'Armor, s'est contenté de puiser librement aux sources du folklore local. Non. Il s'est seulement inspiré des mélodies merveilleuses. Il en a pénétré le sens profond. A force de les aimer, il est parvenu à en créer d'autres, qui, tout imaginatives qu'elles soient, exercent sur l'auditeur une séduction égale.<sup>77</sup>

Vuillemin (1879–1929) was Breton and a founder-member and president of the Association des Compositeurs Bretons; his failure to identify the regional material incorporated by Lazzari thus presents a curious paradox. For the composer plundered the same productive regional source as Bataille had done before him and yet, in spite of the charges of plagiarism aimed at the dramatist, he emerged unscathed from the scrutiny of his Breton peers.

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<sup>76</sup> Vuillemin was a native of Nantes. He also composed a one-act opera *Le Double voile* (1908–9) which is set in a Breton fishing village.

<sup>77</sup> ['You would be wrong to conclude that the composer, having set the score of *La Lépreuse* in the country of Armor (Brittany), contented himself with drawing freely on local folklore sources. No. He was merely inspired by wonderful melodies. He penetrated their deep meaning. Since he loved them, he was able to create other (tunes) which, however much they derive from the composer's imagination, still exercise the same seductive power over the listener.']

Louis Vuillemin, *Comoedia*, February 1912, in 'Opinions de la Presse sur *La Lépreuse*', dossier d'œuvre (Paris: BN)

In his 1922 Preface to the published edition of the play, Bataille hints that the collaboration between librettist and composer possessed unique features:

Lazzari avait suivi la même méthode que la mienne et au lieu de pénétrer comme tant de musiciens dans le folklore national, en déformant les thèmes populaires, il demeura respectueux des rythmes nus. [...] Il faut voir ce que par la simple orchestration, il est arrivé à faire des six premières notes du motif noté par la Villemarqué et qui est devenu le thème fondamental de *La Lépreuse*.<sup>78</sup>

The motif to which Bataille refers is taken from the beginning of the *gwerz* 'Ar Chakous', an erstwhile orally-transmitted melody amongst those which were collected by La Villemarqué and which were cumulatively appended to the *Barsaz Breiz* editions of 1839, 1845 and 1867. The folk tune is the setting for the lament 'Le Lépreux' from the chapter of the same name in the *Barsaz Breiz* which provided the source material for Bataille's drama. From the first four bars of this skeletal, unharmonised melody, which is modal in character (Aeolian on G), Lazzari fashioned the primary 'infection' motif; it consistently alerts the audience to the omnipresent, insidious threat of infection and to its putative source, thereby inviting a misogynistic conflation of woman and predatory vampire:

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<sup>78</sup> ['Lazzari had followed the same method as my own and instead of delving, as many musicians do, into national folklore and thereby distorting popular themes, he remained respectful of unadorned rhythms. This can be seen by the way in which, through simple orchestration, he came to use the first six notes of the motif noted by La Villemarqué which then became the fundamental theme of *La Lépreuse*.']

Bataille (1922), p. 22.



Example 1: 'Le Lépreux',<sup>79</sup>

Aliette's imminent arrival in Act I initiates the clearest statement of the motif in the entire opera; her knock on the farmhouse door is immediately taken up by a transparent statement of the motif throughout the orchestral texture and her pathological menace is unequivocally proclaimed since, at this point, the motif is, in the terms which Carolyn Abbate uses to distinguish between musical signifiers, both 'iconic' and 'arbitrary'. It is iconic because it 'refers to something sonorous' and is aurally mimetic — the rhythm of the knock is sounded on the door before the 'infection motif' is musically stated; it is, nonetheless, 'arbitrary' because the conjunction between the signifier (the motif) and the signified (the malady) 'is forcibly established and not "conventional" (it exists only within a single piece).'<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> The musical examples from the *Barsaz Breiz* in this chapter are taken from a 2003 reprint (Paris: Éditions du Lateur) in which the full set of scores from the 1867 edition is included.

<sup>80</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 33.



Example 2: Act I, Scene 3. 'Who is knocking?' (VS, p. 33).

Yet if Lazzari perpetrated a symbolic '*attentat*' by basing the 'infection' motif on a simple rising fifth and infusing it with a double layer of semiotic significance, he also deployed a 'double borrowing' since, in diminution, the motif draws rhythmically on the opening bars of Beethoven's Symphony No.5. Its similarity to the Beethovenian 'insistent fate' motif, however, serves a practical purpose. In order for Aliette's seductive powers to be credible, her physical beauty must be visibly unmarked by disease; the motif, however, is primed persistently to alert the audience to the tragic moral flaws that her outward perfections conceal and to the inexorable outcome of the malady that she dispenses.

The allegory through which medieval leprosy symbolically represents syphilitic infection is, in addition, aptly assisted by the interval of the rising fifth, which the first part of the motif encompasses. Throughout the opera, the motif is subject to very limited variation; however when the interval of a tritone replaces the perfect fifth, its dissonant and diabolical qualities inevitably reinforce the sense of pathological threat. As the fourth *lavandière* speculates about the transmission of infection, she suggests that leprosy might be caught through a keyhole; she is then contradicted by the first



washerwoman who indicates that the disease is actually spread by drinking from a glass that a leper has used. Their fears, which underpin the strategies of social exclusion in response to disease which are at the heart of the opera's social discourse, are articulated by the double deployment of the motif in the bass in association with the tritone (bars 6–13 of Example 3). The deployment of the intervallically-altered motif in close proximity to its normal manifestation also allows the music to insinuate the notion that the fear of infection is as socially disruptive as the illnesses which conjure it; as Maria calls down a blessing to negate the fears which the *lavandières* have foolishly aired, the motif is restored to its rising-fifth format (bars 17–20) thus suggesting the inexorable path of the disease. The chromaticism of the answering second cell, ushered in by a false relation (G/G flat in bar 19 of Example 3) and completed by an enharmonically-spelled augmented sixth chord, nevertheless implies the bitter futility of her intervention.

4<sup>me</sup> LAVANDIERE. 4. Wäscherin.

por - te. Si le Vent a - vait chan-gé de cô - té, vous au -  
lau - ern. Wie ver - mes - sen, dem Ver-stand - nen zu nah'n! Hätt' der

1<sup>ere</sup> LAVANDIERE. 1. Wäscherin.

riez at - tra-pé la lè - pre par le trou de la ser - ru - re! Non, A - na - ik, ce n'est pas  
Wind sich ge-dreht, so hät-test du dir selbst ge - holt das Ü - bel. Tö-richtes Ding! das ist nicht

vrai; mais ce qui est la vé-ri-té, c'est qu'il suf-fit de boire au verre, où les  
 wahr! Doch wahr ist und ein Je-der weiß, daß Je-nem si-cher ist der Tod, wer vom

*m.g.* *p* molto cresc. e poco accel.

MARIA.  
 lè-vres ont tou-ché. Dieu pro-tè-ge no-tre pa-rois-se!  
 Glas des Kran-ken trinkt. Gott der Herr be-hüt uns in Gna-den!

*Trbn*

20 *p* *espress.* *pp* *6* *19*

Jeu-ne fil-le mal a-vi-  
 Doch, ihr Mäd-chen, laßt die-se

\* *Ca.*

Example 3: Act I, Scene 1. 'If the wind had changed direction, you would have caught leprosy through the keyhole.' (VS, p. 12).

Whilst this motif is central to the symbolic impact of the opera, additional leitmotifs which frame and support the action are also significant; however, Lazzari, as indeed Bataille had hinted, owed an extensive debt to the brief scores which accompanied the text of La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz*. Aliette's complex character is also associated with a second melody, sounded first on the oboe (Example 4, bars 1–8)) when Ervoanik pleads for her to be admitted to the farmhouse; optimistically, in a major key and with a transparent texture, it transmits her potential for platonic, unselfish love.

Lent. (♩ = 50.)  
**ALIETTE.** (derrière la porte)  
 Alietta. (hinter dem Tor)

5

C'est la pe-tite A-li-et-te qui de-mande ou-ver-tu-re. Ouvrez-lui vo-tre por-te,  
 Ich bin's, die klei-ne A-liet-ta, die hier Ein-lass sich er-bit-tet. Öff-net mir Eu-ro-Tü-re,

*p dolce, très lié*

10  
**ERVOANIK.** Janik.

vous me l'a-vez ou-ver-te sou-vent. Je vous en prie, ma mè-re, ou-vrez-lui!  
 sie schon so manches Mal Ihr ge-tan. Will-fahrt ihr, lie-be Mutter, öff-net ihr!

*ppp*

(Maria, après une hésitation, se dirige vers la porte)  
 (Maria geht zögernd zum Tor)

15

*poco cresc.*

*pp*

Example 4: Act I, Scene 3. Aliette's theme (VS, p. 33).

**IANNIK SKOLAN**

*Triste*

Tro ma re e sar — re enn de ,  
 Teu — e enn dru — fe — reh du — me ,  
 Pe — za enn dru — fe — reh enn ti ,  
 Doe'h enn holl de — fe jo — lo — ri

Example 5: 'Iannik Skolan'<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> La Villemarqué (2003), p. 557.

The provenance of Lazzari's musical folk sources have apparently not been detected or recorded before this study. Indeed, the regional exhibition *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* in Quimper in 1994 drew attention to Bataille's plagiarism but failed to note the composer's symmetrical and indisputable recourse to the musical appendix of the *Barsaz Breiz*. The conjunct 'platonic love' theme is, nonetheless, also a direct borrowing from La Villemarqué. In the same way that Bataille pillaged Breton texts in a seemingly random fashion, Lazzari here demonstrably makes use of a tune which has no obvious connection with the medieval leper legend. The tune is the designated accompaniment for the story of 'Iannik Skolan' in the *Barsaz Breiz*; the associated narrative relates to a tale of implied attempted rape and murder and the only tenuous links which might have attracted Lazzari to the material are the presence of the name Iannik (a corruption of Ervoanik) and the theme of divine mercy.

Nor is the appropriation of the 'Iannik Skolan' theme an isolated incident. The *lavandières* (washerwomen) are also allocated a theme lifted wholesale from La Villemarqué's collection (Example 6, bars 1-4). In this case the folk tune can be identified as 'Ar Rannou' (Example 7), the first of the collected scores and the accompaniment to the ballad 'Les Séries ou le Druide et l'Enfant'.<sup>82</sup> Yet, since the brisk rhythm and circular nature of the melody, which allow for its perpetual continuation, are ideally suited to the repetitive nature of the washerwomen's task, Lazzari's appropriation of the folk tune appears to be entirely apposite.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 535.

*Tres animé.*  
3<sup>me</sup> LAVANDIÈRE. 3. Wäscherin. 4<sup>me</sup> LAVANDIÈRE. 4. Wäscherin.

Oboe  
Voi-ci les che-mi-ses du sieur de la Tremblaye. On lave, on soude  
O scht, wie so blank die-ses Hemd, weißer wie Schnee! So geht's

1<sup>ere</sup> et 2<sup>me</sup> LAVANDIÈRE. 1. u. 2. Wäscherin.  
3<sup>me</sup> et 4<sup>me</sup> LAVAND. 3. u. 4. Wäscherin.  
On lave, on la-ve. Man wäscht, wäscht im-mer-su.  
lève, on lave, on la-ve. Vingt ans, trente ans, ma ca-ma-ra-de,  
Rub, man wäscht, wäscht im-mer-su. Zwei-ßig, drei-ßig Jahr währt die Fla-go.

*p* *fp* *resc.* *f*

Example 6: Act I, Scene 1. The *Lavandières* 'washing' theme (VS, p. 9).

AR RANNOU  
LES SÉRIES

*Allegro*

Da-ik, mab gwenn Drouiz; o-re; Da-ik, pe-tra  
fel d'id-de? Pe-tra ga-ninn-me d'id-de?  
—Kan d'in euz a eur rann Ken a ouf-enn  
bre-man. Heb rann ar Red  
heb-ken: An-kou, tad ann An-ken; Ne  
tra ken ne tra ken. Da-ik, mab gwenn  
Drouiz; o-re; Da-ik, pe-tra fell d'id-de?  
Pe-tra ga-ninn-me d'id-de? —Kan d'in euz a  
zaou rann, Ken a ouf-enn bre-man.

Example 7: 'Ar Rannou'<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 535.

The musical borrowings, however, arguably contribute to the pervasive terror which emanates from the persistent juxtaposition of signifiers of normative reality — in this case the quaint, homespun regional melodies — with intimations of their inverse. The musical promotion of the '*attental*', similarly, reaches its apotheosis in the central act when Aliette sings Ervoanik to sleep (Examples 9–11). Aliette's song is a conventional lullaby in 6/8 time and with the expected rocking accompaniment figures; nevertheless, as a diegetic interlude in which the protagonist knowingly sings in the on-stage world, it is, as with all the phenomenal songs in the Breton operas in this study, symbolically layered. It ostensibly asserts the conventional, patriarchally-defined values of femininity as associated with home, hearth and cradle. Nevertheless, as Ervoanik sleeps, the song fragments into alliterative, meaningless vocalizations: 'tan tan dir ah tan, tan tan dir ah tan, tan tan dir ah do.'



ALLETTE. Alietta.

*rit. a tempo*

Fer-me tes yeux, tout  
Schließ' doi-ne Aug-lein

*pp p m.g.*

*2da. tres ho*

doux! Ta mère est i-ci, mon bel en-fant, à te veill-er, à  
zu! Dein Müt-ter-lein wiegt dich sanft zur Ruh! sie wacht ü-ber dich, sie

te-ber-er, po-tit ché-ri. Ta mère est i-ci, ton père est là  
lul-lé dich ein, mein Lieb-chen-fein. Dein Müt-ter-lein wacht, Dein Va-ter gibt

*rit. a tempo*

haut, tan tan dir ah tan tan tan dir ah tan, tan tan dir ah do!  
Acht, la la la la la, tra la la la la, tra la la la la.

*rit. pp a tempo*

Example 9: Act II, Scene 4. 'Softly close your eyes! Your mother is here to rock you, little darling.' (VS, p. 88).

Such moments, as Abbate suggests, 'play on the suspicious power of music and its capacity to move us without the power of rational speech'.<sup>84</sup> Here, however, the vocalizations are doubly resonant since the dissolution of meaningful text ushers in an extended 'stream of consciousness' in which the fragmented, many-faceted personality of the female protagonist and her capacity for pathological menace are revealed. Moreover, since the lullaby is cavatina-like and is followed by a brief declaration of resolve, it momentarily sets up the expectation of a conventional double aria.

Aliette's instability is, however, projected by the subversion of the expected cabaletta. The resolve to avoid physical contact with Ervoanik, 'Enlevez-le de mes bras !' (Take him from my arms!), thus degenerates into a rambling attempt to find solace in religion and its emblems; in the course of the monologue she prays to God, the Virgin and her personified scapular, the outward symbol of the divine grace to which she momentarily aspires. Nevertheless, her religious fervour ushers in a confession of her past crimes; the disturbing revelation that she has worn the scapular whilst seducing and infecting innocent victims then leads to an impious declaration of her intent to harm in which the 'infection' motif is not only embedded in the accompaniment but finally unequivocally projected into the vocal line at the point where she declares 'j'en tuerais mille' ('I would kill a hundred'):

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<sup>84</sup> Abbate (1991), p. 4.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece, divided into three systems. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system has a vocal line (A1) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with the lyrics 'mains... naht...' and 'D'u - ne gout - te de / Nur ein Bluts - tröpflein'. The piano accompaniment features a complex, flowing melody. The second system continues the vocal line with 'sang / rot.' and 'de ce pe - tit doigt / das von Fin - ger - lein rinnt,'. The piano accompaniment includes a section marked 'fp' (fortissimo piano) and 'Animé'. The third system features the vocal line with 'j'en tue - rais cent, / Bringt bit - tern Tod' and 'j'en tue - rais mil - le! / moncher Mut - ter Kind!'. The piano accompaniment includes a section marked 'f marc.' (forte marcato) and 'rall. molto' (rallentando molto). The score is written in French and German.

Example 10: 'With one drop of blood from this little finger,  
I would kill a hundred, I would kill a thousand!'  
(VS, p. 96).

The sections of the monologue are, in addition, characterized by key changes which, with the exception of a brief interlude in C major (an interjection of the 'unselfish love' theme as Aliette distractedly contemplates a platonic future with Ervoanik) are based on rising minor thirds (G sharp minor, B minor, D minor) rather than on predictable relationships. Similarly, the vocal line becomes increasingly erratic and disjunct and the rhythmic patterns of the accompaniment are unpredictable.

The anticipated double aria is, then, replaced by an extended 'lullaby of insidious harm'; its shocking message is, in addition, aptly reinforced in the concluding bars,

by the absence of a virtuosic coda and a grim, unmelodious adherence to ‘the word’ (Example 11). Aliette’s desperate attempt to regain psychological equilibrium through prayer is projected by the reduction of the vocal line to stasis via a metrically free, monotone B which exploits the lower limit of the soprano tessitura. Effectively a dominant pedal, the vocal line thus delivers what Michel Poizat’s study of opera-audience expectations in association with the complex physical and metaphysical relationships between sound and silence, recognizes as ‘a veritable metonymy of silence: the long steady note that immediately precedes the “consequent” silence, the silence that must be inhabited by God, [...]’ and which ‘[...] unless infused with the divine is unbearable.’<sup>85</sup> Since, however, the monologue has undermined all religious certainties, Aliette’s continuous monotone is paradigmatic of the unbearable ‘silence that results from [...] destruction, a deadly silence, the pulsing of presence and absence.’<sup>86</sup> In yet another of the ‘inversions’ which mark the opera, then, Aliette’s crucial monologue plays itself out with the substitution and denial of *jouissance*, the ecstatic gratification which Poizat argues is delivered by the high soprano voice in soaring flight.

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<sup>85</sup> Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. by Arthur Denner (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 88.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87



(*schneil uerrwind*) *a tempo*

A - yez pi - tié de moi. Ma - rie, mè - re du ciel, mè - re des an - ges, mè - re du ro - sai - re, mè - re ché -  
*Hab' Er - barmen mit mir, Ma - ria, Mut - ter Got - tes, Mut - ter der Gna - den, ho - he Him - mels - kö - nig - in, Jung - frau Ma -*

(*Elle se signe longement*) *a tempo*  
*(Sie bekrenzt sich mit Inbrunst.)*

ri - e!  
 ri - a!

*p* *f cresc.*

Example 11: 'Have mercy on me, Mary, mother of heaven, mother of the angels, mother of the rosary.' (VS, p. 97).

The *lavandières*, who are instrumental in maintaining audience awareness of the hideous parallel world of the leper colony, are musically linked to Aliette. The first scene of the opera, in which a conventional chorus might be expected, is in fact almost entirely taken up with the activities and pronouncements of the four washerwomen. Yet, not only are they accorded the first phenomenal song of the opera, but the melody is a lullaby which prefigures both Aliette's monologue in the central act and the psychological dilemma which that scene projects. It prophetically deals with romantic love, longing, physical separation and loss:

Tempo I. 1<sup>ère</sup> LAVANDIÈRE. 1. Wäscherin. *poco rit.* *a tempo*

Tra-la la la la di-ra la. Rien ne peut me con-so-  
 Tra-la la la tra-le-ra la. Bist gar grau-sam, Liebchen

*p dolce* *poco rit.* *p a tempo*

ler, o rei tra la la la di-ra la, Si ce n'est le souf-fle qui vient de son lit. Et pour-  
 du, tra la la la tra-le-ra la. Und schließest all-näch-tig die Tür vor mir zu; Ach, so

*cresc.* *p*

tant cin-quant-e nuits, je les ai dor-mis au seuil de sa por-te. Et le temps pas-se-ra tou-  
 man-che lan-gue Nacht hab still ich ge-harrt in bit-te-rem Leid und wußt nicht, wie mir ver-ging die

*poco cresc.*

*pp molto rit.*

jours... et le temps pas-se-ra tou-jours.  
 Zeit... wußt nicht, wie mir ver-ging die Zeit.

*pp molto rit.* *p poco cresc.* *molto accel.*

Example 12: Act I, Scene 1. 'Nothing can comfort me, if it is not his breathing coming from his bed.  
 And yet I spent fifty nights sleeping on the threshold of his door.  
 And time keeps passing.'  
 (VS, pp. 8-9).



However, although the song contains the refrain 'Et le temps passera toujours',<sup>87</sup> a phrase that Aliette reiterates in the course of her own monologue, it is stated here as a coherent part of the melody rather than as a disjointed fragment which signals incipient breakdown. In addition, although the *lavandière*'s song opens with wordless vocalizations which will later be recalled in Aliette's 'lullaby of insidious harm', meaningful text is swiftly introduced; on this occasion the 'suspicious power of music' is not the gateway to irrational emotion but to the assertion of the only values that retain any vestige of meaning in the bleak prognosis of future degeneration. The refrain thus acknowledges the healing power of time and the strophes of the song are punctuated by the 'washing theme' which proclaims the value of the communal work ethic as an antidote to despair.

The *lavandière*'s song is thus a musical trope of the dramatic and psychological function of the washerwomen; they establish the norms against which Aliette and Tili will be measured and as signifiers of normality, assist in maintaining audience-awareness of the ongoing terrorist *attentat*. Yet, in according this dramatic status to the washerwomen, Lazzari and Bataille seem to have exploited popular images prevalent in art, literature and folk legends which appealed to both central hegemony and to Breton regional symbolism. Uncomplicated genre paintings of washerwomen at work were relatively common in the nineteenth century prior to the conception and genesis of the opera and the drama which provided its libretto; both the establishment and the avant-garde, however, provided notable depictions of washerwomen which may have influenced Bataille and Lazzari, particularly in the light of Bataille's own artistic interests.

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<sup>87</sup> ['... and time keeps passing'.]

The most famous nineteenth-century academic French painter, Adolphe William Bouguereau,<sup>88</sup> who exhibited regularly at the Paris Salon, produced the genre painting, *La Lavandière de Fouesnant*, in 1869; the costume designs for the *lavandières* in the opera seem to directly reflect the drab attire and fitted bonnets of the laundry women in the background of Bouguereau's idealized Breton scene of feminine toil and graceful nun-like resignation (Figures 17– 18), whilst the stage directions for the opera, which require the washerwomen to carry 'paquets [...] sur la tête' (bundles of washing on their heads) as they enter, equally recall the central figure of the painting.

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<sup>88</sup> Adolphe William Bouguereau (1825–1905).



17: Adolphe William Bouguereau, 1869, *La Lavandière de Fouesnant*, oil on canvas, Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, New York.



18: Costume design for Les Lavandières, Act I.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to Bouguereau's photographic, quasi-religious treatment of his *laveuses*, the Impressionists also derived inspiration from laundrywomen; Degas' 1884 painting *The Launderesses* captures a moment in which a yawning *repasseuse* grasps a bottle, oblivious, in her exhaustion, to her surroundings or companion. Degas chooses to depict the brutal nature of the work and arguably to suggest that unremitting labour can be morally degenerative rather than spiritually uplifting.

<sup>89</sup> Marcel Mültzer, 1912, Costumes for *La Lépreuse*, pencil, ink and watercolour on card, Bibliothèque Musée de l'Opéra, D 216.





19: Edgar Degas, 1884, *Repasseuses*, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Of the Pont-Aven artists who boarded in Le Pouldu, the resort in Finistère where Lazzari began writing *La Lépreuse*, and who took advantage of the creative isolation which the embryonic resort offered, Gauguin, the most notable, was equally drawn to the subject. However, Gauguin's washerwomen are presented as part of the Breton landscape; barely distinguishable from the boulders by the river over which they bend, they remain enigmatic, isolated and enclosed in their own private world.



20: Paul Gauguin, 1886, *Les Lavandières à Pont Aven*, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

These conflicting images of gendered toil in the artworks of the period had their literary equivalents in Breton regional literature and in the literature which emanated from Paris. Anatole Le Braz's poem, *Au Lavoir de Keranglaz*, reinforced the image of the Breton washerwoman as the repository of Celtic 'otherness' in harmony with a beguilingly picturesque landscape; nevertheless, the closing, epigrammatic couplet introduces an element of warning. The young washer-girls in the poem are witnesses to a mysterious event which presages the eradication of a family line; the inert 'quenouille' (distaff) is an effective metaphor for the anxieties relating to racial degeneration which underpin the opera:



*Au lavoir de Keranglaz*

L'étang mire des fronts de jeunes lavandières.  
Les langues vont jasant au rythme des battoirs,  
Et, sur les coteaux gris, étoilés de bruyères,  
Le linge blanc s'empourpre à la rougeur des soirs.

Au loin, fument des toits, sous les vertes ramées,  
Et, droites, dans le ciel, s'élèvent les fumées.

Tout proche est le manoir de Keranglaz, vêtu  
D'ardoise, tel qu'un preux en sa cotte de maille,  
Et des logis de pauvre, aux coiffures de paille,  
Se prosternent autour de son pignon pointu.

Or, par les sentiers, vient une fille, si svelte  
Qu'une tige de blé la prendrait pour sa sœur;  
C'est la dernière enfant d'un patriarche celte,  
Et sa beauté pensive est faite de douceur.

Elle descend, du pas étrange des statues,  
Et, soudain, au lavoir, les langues se sont tues.

L'eau même qui susurre au penchant du chemin  
Se tait, sous ses pieds nus qui se heurtent aux pierres,  
On voit courir des pleurs au long de ses paupières,  
Et sa quenouille pend, inerte, de sa main...

L'étang mire, joyeux, des fronts de lavandières,  
Et sait pourtant quel deuil ils porteront demain !...<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> ['The Washing Place at Keranglaz']

['The pool reflects the faces of the young washer-girls.  
Their tongues chatter to the rhythm of their beating,  
And on the grey hills starred with heather  
The white linen takes on the colour of the setting sun.

In the distance, the roofs steam under the leafy branches,  
And the smoke rises vertically into the sky.

Close by is the manor of Keranglaz,  
Slate-clad, like a knight in armour,  
And the humble, thatched dwellings,  
Bow down before its pointed gable.

Then, along the paths comes a girl, so slender  
That a blade of corn would hail her as a sister.  
She is the last child of a Celtic patriarch  
And her thoughtful beauty is the essence of sweetness.

She walks down the path with a strange, still statue-step,

Zola's novel *L'Assommoir* from the Rougon Macquart series was similarly ambivalent in its exposé of the links between cleanliness and innocence.<sup>91</sup> In the novel, the acquisition of a laundry marks the most successful part of Gervaise Macquart's life; the act of washing is aligned with productive industry, feminine fortitude and the development of an independent identity which initially withstands temptation. Gervaise's downward spiral into degradation is, nevertheless, heralded by the loss of the laundry to a rival, so that moral health and the physical labour of washing are closely aligned.<sup>92</sup>

The complexity of the symbolism attached to the act of washing and the tasks of laundry women and the diverse range of images available to Lazzari and Bataille was nonetheless undoubtedly augmented by a widely disseminated Breton legend, 'Les Lavandières de la nuit' which had been collected and published by both Souvestre and Luzel, Bataille's Breton mentor at the time when his interest in the story of the leper was first aroused.<sup>93</sup> In the legend, which lent itself to appropriation by nineteenth-century misogyny, the washerwomen are spectral and sinister; they wash

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And suddenly, at the washing place, the tongues are stilled.

Even the water which murmurs as it meets the path,  
Becomes silent under the bare feet which stumble over the stones.  
You can see the tears which run from her eyelashes  
And her distaff hangs useless in her hand.

The pool reflects the faces of the young washer-girls.  
And knows, meanwhile, the griefs that they will bear tomorrow.']

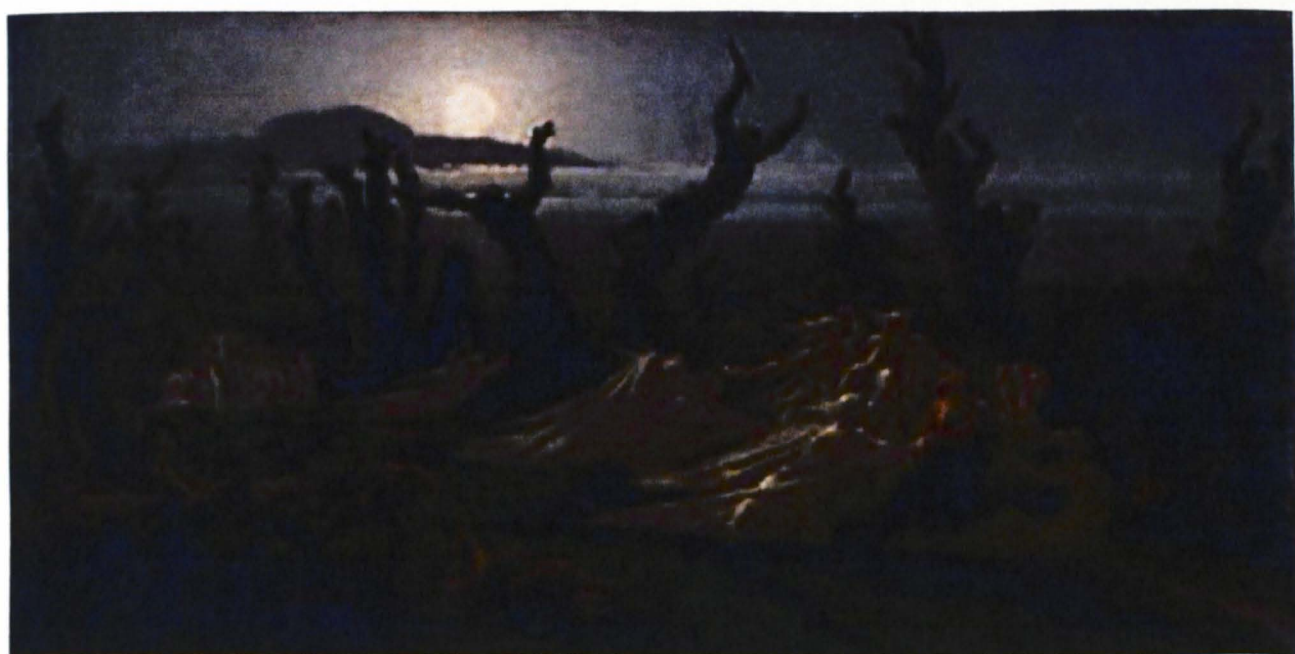
Anatole Le Braz, 'Au lavoir de Keranglaz', *Poèmes votifs* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1927).

<sup>91</sup> The novel had been dramatised as early as 1879. In 1900 the drama was staged in Paris at the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint Martin. *Le Théâtre*, 2, 47 (1900), pp. 3-24.

<sup>92</sup> Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir*, 1876 (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

<sup>93</sup> George Sand produced a variant of the story, 'Les Laveuses de la nuit' in 1858 in *Légendes rustiques*. In this version, the washerwomen are eternally-damned mothers who have murdered their infant children.

shrouds by night on All Hallows' Eve and entice unsuspecting male travellers to aid them in their labours. The unwise traveller, in the ensuing *danse macabre*, is subsequently 'washed' to death, suffering multiple fractures as the women assiduously pursue their work. A particularly vivid and well-known depiction of the legend by the Breton artist Yann Dargent had been gifted to the Musée des beaux arts in Quimper in 1899; however, the regional significance of the legend is equally reflected in the fact that it had featured as a ballad in an earlier opera.<sup>94</sup>



21: Yann Dargent, 1861, *Les Lavandières de la nuit*, oil on canvas, Musée des beaux arts, Quimper.

Thus the *lavandières* are powerful, yet ambivalent regional and cultural symbols whose presence allows for the exploration of a range of issues; as women who work with water, they are significantly representative of the eternal feminine, since as

<sup>94</sup> Jules Boverly and Théophile Simon, *Bretagne et Mercœur* (1837). Of the ballad 'Les Laveuses de la nuit', only the music remains.

Dijkstra notes, water for a woman is: ‘the natural mirror [...], the source of her impersonal, self-contained self-identity.’<sup>95</sup> They are, moreover, fitting, sometimes sinister, harbingers of the rustic *demi-monde* of the leper colony and their music is crucial to the way in which the audience is initiated into the nuances of the dramatic action. They fulfil, appropriately, an identical function to the chorus in Greek tragedy: they possess a strong gender identity; they have a clearly designated social space and function and are in a position to comment on past actions which will direct the drama unfolding on stage and to predict the likely outcome of future events.

All of their utterances, however apparently trivial, are significant; their dramatic status is, moreover, declared by the fact that they introduce the infection motif for the first time and are instrumental in conveying the indiscriminate ubiquity of infection and of slyly insinuating the notion that infection, both moral and physical, is rife in the community. When the motif is sounded *marcato* in the bass of the orchestral accompaniment in the first scene as a *lavandière* speculates that she might be washing the clothes of a leper, it ends with a half-diminished chord which initiates a flurry of chromatic descents at the top of the texture, thus allowing the *lavandières* to musically proclaim the destabilizing momentum of pathological harm, but also to convey the fragility of their superficially tranquil rural idyll.

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<sup>95</sup> Dijkstra (1986), p. 132.

Très animé.  
2<sup>me</sup> LAVANDIÈRE. 2. Wäscherin

Lin - ge de dame et de ca - pi - tai - ne, de rec - teur et de Sé - né - chal,  
Wä - sche für man - che viel - ed - le Da - me, Wä - sche auch für die Bett - le - rin!

cresc. Lent. (♩ = 66)

lin - ge de lé - preux, qui sait?  
Und viel - leicht für Aus - sät - zi - ge!

p cresc. marcato

Modérément animé. (♩ = 84)

MARIA.  
La  
Be -

M. E. 525

Example 13: Act I. 'Linen from the lady, the captain, the rector and the Seneschal, linen from the leper, who knows?' (VS, p. 10).

In addition, the daily task which the washerwomen perform operates within the opera as a powerful allegory of expiation; the actual act of cleansing which is performed on stage recalls the 'Lavabo' of the Mass and symbolizes the eradication of sin and the path of the individual towards redemption. The washerwomen, then, are intimately linked with religious and social responses to sin and disease; even when they are absent from the stage, the obsessive, persistent use of the adjective 'white' within the libretto ensures the subliminal intrusion of their function into the collective subconscious of the audience.



The tonal framework outlined by the washerwomen is, significantly, that which sustains the entire work. The first act opens not with a full scale overture, but with a brief prelude which conveys, in E major, a key which, elsewhere in the opera is associated with radiant health, the pastoral idyll and the sounds of the waking farm; conventionally, oboes and flutes transmit the crowing of cocks and the dawn chorus:

The musical score is for Act I, 'Le Réveil de la ferme', 'The Waking Farm', (VS, p. 3). It is in E major and 3/4 time. The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows a piano introduction with a treble and bass staff, marked 'pp' and 'x.c.'. The second system introduces the Hautbois (oboe) and Flûte (flute) parts, with the piano continuing. The third system shows the vocal entry of Maria, with the text '(Maria sort de la maison) (Maria tritt aus dem Hause)' and the tempo marking 'Modéré. (♩ = 56)'. The piano accompaniment continues with a 'pp' marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 14: Act I. 'Le Réveil de la ferme', 'The Waking Farm', (VS, p. 3).

Into this rural setting, the characters of Matelinn and Maria, paradigmatic of bourgeois social norms, are then briefly introduced; however, as the 'Ar Rannou' theme which mimics the beating of linen is heard for the first time and the first



*lavandière* enters, the music modulates to C major. Thereafter, with little digression, the significant music of the washerwomen, particularly when they are locked in the intimate, closed world reminiscent of Gauguin's washerwomen (Figure 20) makes use of either that key or its relative minor. Since the final cadence of the first and final acts of the opera are in C major and the key of C minor in the second act is associated with that part of the dramatic action in which Ervoanik becomes infected and in which the deployment of the 'infection motif' achieves saturation levels, the elevated stature of the *lavandières* is, by association, tonally as well as dramatically projected.

C major is, moreover, an apposite key for the washerwoman and for their social and dramatic roles; it is a 'clean' key and the absence of sharps or flats allows for its association with moral cleansing. Its deployment within the opera is symbolic of communal life, cultural identity, shared aspiration and suffering; in contrast, deviation from that key in the music of the *lavandières* signals their ambivalence.

As the mediators between the parallel worlds of the village and its liminal *demi-monde* counterpart they thus articulate literary and musical explorations of the sacred and the profane which amplify the symbolic dualities which are asserted throughout the dramatic action. The significance of the tonal framework with which they are associated is, moreover, further augmented by the fact that C major is given additional religious significance; it is the key to which Aliette and Ervoanik leave for the *Pardon* and in which the church bells predominantly sound.

The church bells, similarly, provide structural and dramatic cohesion within the work and are instrumental in the process of musical characterization and the transmission of the opera's social commentary. They are first heard in the final scene of Act I as

the lovers, Ervoanik and Aliette, prepare to go to the Pardon. The audience is alerted to the transparent nature of the male protagonist since he enthusiastically hails the sound as ‘les belles cloches de dimanche’ (‘the beautiful Sunday bells’). Aliette’s menace, however, is signalled by her inability to process the sound, which she mistakes for a death knell. Her misinterpretation, a prefiguring of the significance which the bells will acquire in the final act, is musically projected. The bells are added to the score for the scene; however, Aliette’s angst-ridden menace causes the sinister sound of the *cor bouché* (muted horn) to briefly displace the bells with sustained notes which suggest a single tolling bell. Lazzari’s deployment of the bell timbre thus acquires complex and equivocal associations; it differs markedly from the calls to prayer, the conjuring of idyllic landscapes and the recollection of childhood which Robert Waters identifies as significant in the onomatopoeic reproduction of bells in the music of Southern regionalists.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Robert F. Waters, *Déodat de Séverac: Musical Identity in Fin de Siècle France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 75–8.

Plus lent. Tempo I. ERVOANIK. Janik.

J'ai choi - si Je - sus pour mon Ré-demp - teur. E - coutez... les  
 Je - sus, Got - tes Sohn, gnä - dig steh uns bei! Hör, o hör! die

clo - ches! les clo - ches! les bel - les clo - ches de di - man - che! O mon  
 Glock - ken! die Glock - ken! die hel - len Glock - ken, wie sie läu - ten! O mein

(tressaillant) (erschauernd) ERVOANIK. Janik. ALIETTE. (avec effroi) Aliette. (mit Schrecken)

Dieu, pourquoi son - nent - el - les? C'est le dé - part de la ban - niè - re. Ê - tes - vous  
 Gott! Sag, was soll dies Läü - ten? Fort ziehn die Pil - ger mit den Fah - nen. O sag, Ja -

Example 15: Act I, Scene 5. ERVOANIK: 'Listen to the bells, the lovely Sunday bells!'  
 ALIETTE: 'My God, why are they ringing?'  
 (VS, p. 55).

**ALLETTE.** (très-martelé, comme jusqu'au paroxysme)  
**Alietta.** (sehr accentuirt, bis zum Paroxysmus gesteigert)

*Arr. Jan.*

soit? Voi - ci trois jours et trois nuits que je les en - tends à mes o - reil - les... Voi -  
 laut? Seit man - chem Tag, mancher Nacht hör ich solchen Glock - ken-ton er - schal - len, seit

*poco rit.* *Cor bouché.* *p*

*Al.*

ci trois jours et trois nuits que je les en - tends son - ner le deuil sans qu'il y ait chre -  
 man - chem Tag, mancher Nacht klingt es mir im Ohr, als ob der Tod klopft an uns - re

*cresc.*

*Al.*

tien né an - tour d'el - les! Deuil le soir et le ma - tin et ca - ril - lon à mi -  
 Tür dumpf mit der Sen - se. Schreck und Grau - en weckt der Ton, und auf mein Herz fällt es

*cresc.*

Example 16: ALLETTE: 'I've had the sound of the tolling bell in my ears for three days and nights now [...]' (VS, p. 56).

Religious rites, however, underpin this work since the first two acts concern the progress of the lovers to the religious Pardon and the final act centres on a variant of the burial service which brings the terrorist '*attentat*' to its horrific conclusion. Nevertheless, the musical and dramatic treatment of religious themes and issues confirms Debra Silverman's suggestion that the anticlericalism of the Third Republic

was countered by ‘A parallel process of resurgence and reconfiguration [...]’ which, she argues:

[...] suggests the interaction of older cultural legacies in new forms and the shared search by many avant-garde artists to find a replacement for the binding power and totality that had been provided traditional religion.<sup>97</sup>

Although religious rituals commonly occurred within nineteenth-century operas, they did so for particular reasons: the theatrical nature of the religious event contributed to the spectacle, it frequently provided a frisson of gothic interest and allowed for the introduction of mediaeval splendour. As Jules Janin ironically commented: ‘[...] what the *beau monde* of Paris prefers to any other pleasure [...] is a religious ceremony, something that smacks of pomp and dramatic sparkle: a burial, for example [...].’<sup>98</sup> The inclusion of religious ceremonial also allowed for the appraisal of hegemonic moral values in a manner which ultimately asserted the pre-eminence of Christianity. Yet although the inclusion of on-stage ritual had an obvious and close affinity with the deployment of *couleur locale*, since specific locations, buildings and regional costumes were likely to be demanded, *La Lépreuse* nevertheless challenged both the operatic conventions relating to religion and the cultural norms on which they were based. Not only was the spectre of deadly infection an intrinsic element of the libretto and music, but the portrayal of religious responses to disease and to the infected ‘other’ steered an uneasy course between parody and blasphemy. Indeed, the treatment of religious ritual and symbolism in both Lazzari’s opera and Bataille’s original drama subverts audience expectations; it contributes directly to the definition

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<sup>97</sup> Debra Silverman, ‘Transcending the Word’ in Barbara L. Kelly, ed., *French Music, Culture and National Identity* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), pp. 151–2.

<sup>98</sup> Jules Janin, *Un hiver à Paris*, 1842, cited in Lacombe (2001), p. 99.

of the dual worlds whose parallel existence represents a paradigm of social dysfunction and exposes strategies of exclusion in the face of infection.

The final act apparently delivers the expected spectacle in the form of a religious procession and a service for the entire village community which provides an opportunity for the full chorus to be on stage. The Mass of Separation, an actual rite by which the leper was physically, psychologically and spiritually isolated and which is partially, yet faithfully reproduced in the opera, was modelled on the burial service and designed to render the sufferer a living death. The extreme cruelty and pitiful terror of the mediaeval rite is noted by Peter Lewis Allen:

First; the leper was wrapped in a shroud; then he or she was carried to a church that had been draped in funereal black, where the priest took a final confession and intoned the solemn liturgy of a requiem mass. The service then moved to the churchyard. Standing in an open grave, the leper was directly addressed by the priest — not in Latin as usual, but in the vernacular, to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding. Leprosy, the priest explained, was a sign of God's mercy. Rather than waiting until death, the leper was being punished for his or her sins before even departing from this life.<sup>99</sup>

A version of the Mass is given in the '*argument*' which precedes La Villemarqué's story *Le Lépreux*, one of the likely Breton folk sources for the drama which provided the libretto and both dramatist and composer, within the constraints of limited on-stage space and a design which needed to encompass the farm and village, faithfully retained the essential pathos of the mediaeval rite. Much of the horror of the final tableau, indeed, derives from its anticipation both by the crowd of villagers and by the main protagonist, Ervoanik; moreover, those elements of the Mass of Separation

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<sup>99</sup> Peter Lewis Allan, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 36–7.



which are omitted from the dramatic action are accounted for as the *dénouement* is predicted. Ervoanik, finally accepting his fate, thus begs : 'Qu'on cherche des linceuls pour m'ensevelir [...] qu'on allume de la lumière pour me veiller [...].'<sup>100</sup>

Whilst the enshrouding does not occur on stage, it is, nevertheless, an intrinsic element of Ervoanik's anagnorisis.

When the punitive mediaeval rite is finally dramatically depicted, it compounds, as so much else in the opera, the familiar and the horrific. The traditional office for the dead is intoned; however the security of familiarity is dislocated since the central protagonist is alive and visibly suffering the agonies of ritual 'entombment' surrounded by the entire community. The priest and choir thus chant the Latin *Libera, Dies Irae* and *Requiem* whilst the *Sénéchal* delivers the exhortations, a 'parallel' parody of the Ten Commandments, which exclude Ervoanik from village society and sever him from his family for ever. He is exhorted to wear the black leper's hood whenever he goes out and to avoid the mill and the communal oven; he must never wash his hands or clothes in the fountain or reply to anyone unless he is downwind of them and must never wander along narrow lanes at night or bid a final farewell to his sisters, since he is forbidden to embrace children.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> ['Fetch the shrouds to wrap me in – light the vigil lamp.']

<sup>101</sup> The additional commandments, which were omitted from La Villemarqué's account and the libretto included: exhortations to the leper to avoid touching anything he wished to buy, to leave his dwelling only when wearing designated clothing so that he could be readily identified, to avoid taverns, to avoid communal eating except in the company of other lepers and to avoid urinating against public posts unless wearing gloves.

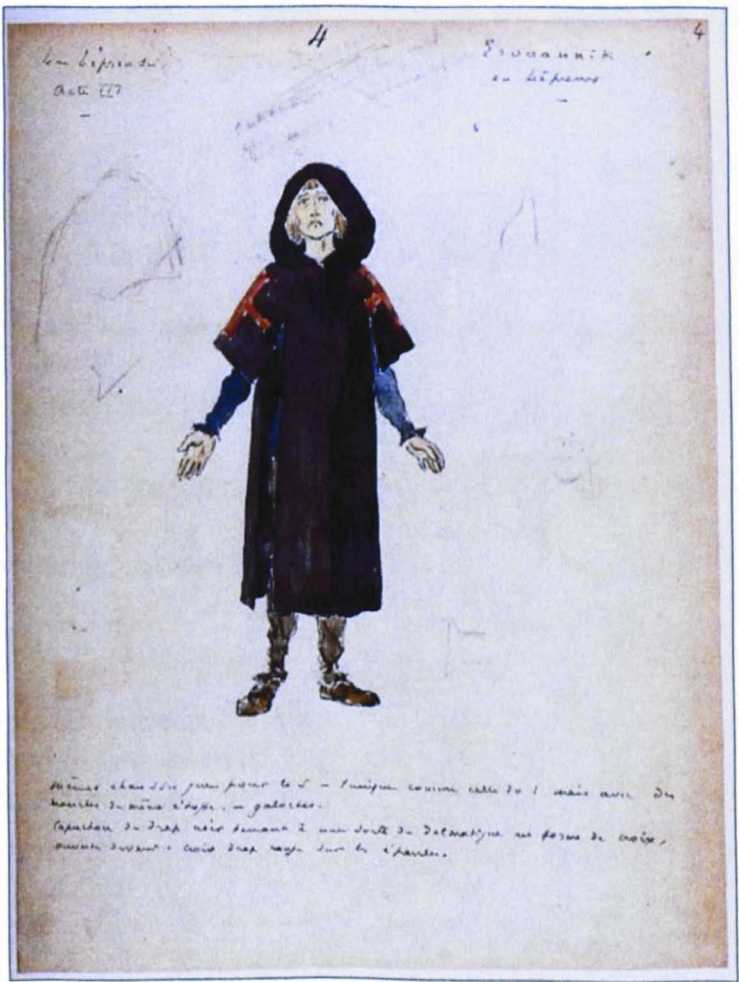


22: Costume design for Ervoanik, Acts I and II.<sup>102</sup>

The accurate transmission of an ancient rite which was embedded in revived Breton folklore, combined with the allegorical content of the work enshrined in the link between leprosy and syphilis, could only have augmented the medical, terrorist manifesto. Yet this final, undeniably theatrical, religious tableau subverts many of the expectations of operatic religious spectacle. Rather than presenting an opportunity for on-stage colour, the Mass of Separation emphasizes the monochromatic aspects of the work which have previously been symbolically asserted by the offstage presence of the ‘white’ leper dwellings and the onstage activities of the washerwomen. The costume sketches, indeed, demonstrate a further reduction of the pictorial tonal range

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

in the final act; Breton, regional costume is absent and although the ecclesiastical vestments and banner contain a small amount of red, the majority of the crowd are drably attired. The *lavandières*, for example, are required to be ‘en cape de deuil’ and the costume is described as: ‘Cape toute en drap noir ou molleton/capuchin pareil. Doublure et bandeau de serge, ou de piqué sur soie/mate.’<sup>103</sup> The gradation of colour tonality is given sudden and immediate significance as Ervoanik’s costume is ritually enveloped by the leper habit to mark the transition from life to living death.



23: Costume design for Ervoanik during the Mass of Separation, Act III.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> [‘In a mourning cape. Cloak in black woollen cloth or soft fabric/similar hood. Lining and headband of serge or of quilting on dull silk.’]

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.



A disquieting element of parody also intervenes. Not only is the Mass of Separation a parallel of the burial service, but the whole of the final act conflates the male protagonist, Ervoanik with the figure of Christ and with the physical and emotional route to crucifixion. Ervoanik thus undergoes the transition from rejection of his fate to submission to inevitable suffering. Whilst he cowers pitifully in the shelter of the patriarchal domicile he echoes Christ's plea 'Take this cup from my lips' as he begs 'Enfermez-moi à clef dans votre chambre par pitié. Je voudrais m'abîmer dans le cœur de la terre.'<sup>105</sup> Although he ultimately submits to social and divine judgement, his language renders the biblical connection transparent when he declares 'Je vais entrer dans ma passion.'<sup>106</sup>

Indeed, the final act, in pictorial terms is an extended pieta in which the relationship between Ervoanik and his mother is axial to the interpretation of the scene. There is little doubt that the audience has been metaphorically transported to the foot of the cross when Maria describes the first and last acts which bind her to her son:

MARIA soutenue par des femmes

Va-t'en mon fils ...

Je t'ai donné ton premier maillot,  
Va- t'en mon fils, tu me reverras,  
Que je t'emmailote encore une fois.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>105</sup> ['Lock me in your room, for pity's sake ... I want to hide at the earth's centre.']

<sup>106</sup> ['I am entering into my mortal agony.']

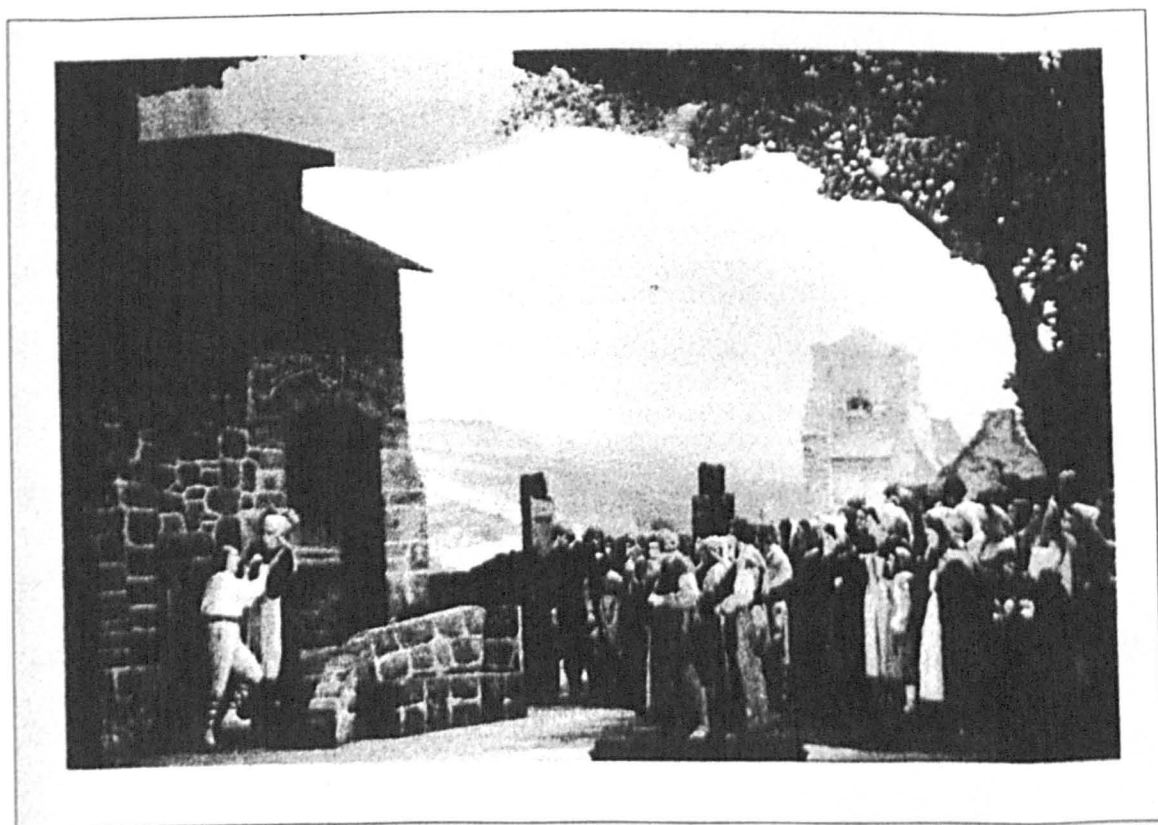
<sup>107</sup> MARIA, [supported by the women]

['Go my son ---

I swaddled you for the first time,

Go my son, you will see me again,

When I wrap you once more (i.e. for burial)'.]



24: Act III, Ervoanik begs to be spared.<sup>108</sup>

However, Ervoanik lacks messianic stature; he is a flawed human being whose downfall has been foreshadowed by a blasphemous communion at the house of La Vieille Tili. At the end of the central act, when Tili induces the unsuspecting Ervoanik to drink from an infected cup, the Christian Mass is directly and chillingly parodied.<sup>109</sup> The sacrament, which would conventionally confer divine grace on the participant who consumes the wine which has mystically become Christ's blood, is subverted at this moment of acute dramatic tension in the opera since Tili maliciously transmits infection. Damnation is thereby substituted for redemption, the prospect of future torment replaces the hope of spiritual grace and the entire symbolism of the divine transaction is inverted.

<sup>108</sup> Photograph from the 1943 production (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra).

<sup>109</sup> See also p. 227.

Lacombe has commented that during the nineteenth century, in France, ‘for the sake of propriety, censors saw to it that the true Catholic liturgy was not belittled by being depicted on stage.’<sup>110</sup> The conflation of Christ and Ervoanik, the metaphorical pilgrimage to the white houses which mimics the devotional route of the Breton Pardon and the parodied burial service would, then, have been enough to make this a contentious work even at the turn of the century; however, the subversion of the Eucharistic doctrine, combined with the medical terrorist agenda, cynical anticlericalism<sup>111</sup> and the insertion of music which reinforced the liturgical connections were likely to have presented an undoubted, if unacknowledged, cultural challenge. Such corrosive, counter-religious elements must inevitably have contributed to the delayed staging of the work.

The conclusion of the opera provides, in addition, no psychological closure. It does however present a marked change from the drama which provided the bulk of the libretto. In Bataille’s stage play, Ervoanik makes the transition from his native village to the leper colony alone. Having heard the off-stage voice of Aliette as she repeats her by-now-familiar tally of infection, and recalling the procession to the Pardon, he feverishly reaches out for her hand as he departs. However, the stage directions explicitly state that the gesture is futile: ‘Il cherche une main dans le vide en s’en allant’ and the last human contact he shares is with his mother, Maria, who utters the final word of the drama.<sup>112</sup> Social exclusion and psychological alienation are thus compacted by Aliette’s absence in the stage play. However, Lazzari chose to reintroduce Aliette in the final moments of the opera and to provide a Wagnerian

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<sup>110</sup> Lacombe (2001), p. 99.

<sup>111</sup> The *lavandières*, in the first scene, indicate that the local monks are debauched perverts.

<sup>112</sup> [‘He reaches out for a hand in the void as he leaves.’]  
Bataille (1922), p. 120.



expiatory conclusion which nevertheless permits the moral dilemmas of the work to be restated and reinforced.

Aliette's entrance disrupts the sound of the church bells; however, when, in the opera she elects to share Ervoanik's exile and takes responsibility for her own infected status, the sound of the bells returns. More significantly, the motif which always announces the presence of infection is transformed and curtailed. The rhythm of the first cell is retained but is now associated with an upward trajectory and deprived of the emphatic second cell. This transformed version accompanies Aliette's last cry of 'Ervoanik' immediately before the lovers disappear from sight; it appears to suggest a reversal of moral if not of physical harm and to aspire melodically to the distant carillon. Yet, although the choir continues to chant the Requiem in the distance, the religious symbolism of the scene remains equivocal. The bells and the liturgical chant are sounded in different keys so that they seem to be two distinct and separate voices. Anticlericalism thus emanates from Lazzari's treatment of the ambivalent voices of the church at the end of the opera and the final, implacable toning of the bells suggests, at best, an indifferent deity.

moi, vous n'a - vez pas peur? Er - vo - a - nik!  
 Lieb, sag' mir, ist dir bang? Weh, Is - nik!

ALIETTE.  
 Alietta.  
 pp.

espr. marcato

(Ils disparaissent. La procession se referme derrière eux et s'éloigne.)  
 (Sie verschwinden. Die Prozession schließt sich hinter ihnen und entfernt sich.)

CLOCHES. Glocken.

Example 17: Act III, Scene 9. The departure for the white houses (VS, p. 203).

*La Lépreuse* was then, at the time of its completion, a highly contentious work. It shattered hegemonic perceptions of bourgeois rusticity since, for Parisian *fin-de-siècle* tourists who sought escape from the metropolis in the summer exodus to the regions, it obliterated the rural idyll which they craved; moreover to those Parisians who retained notions of hegemonic superiority, it provided a reminder of the omnipresent *demi-monde* on the social margins. It raised an inescapable spectre, a horrific phantom at the opera, of sexually-transmitted disease and infection. For male opera-goers, the grim message relating to the social and psychological consequences of illicit sexual activity would have been particularly acute since the words '*traite des chanteuses*' (traffic in singers) were as well inscribed in the French vocabulary as the term '*traite des blanches*' (white slave trade) and the links between lyric performance

and thinly-veiled prostitution were tacitly condoned.<sup>113</sup> The Opéra, indeed, was a known place of assignation and sexual transaction and although the Opéra-Comique was the venue for which the work was destined, audience attendance at either site was not exclusive.<sup>114</sup>

Yet the realist agenda of *La Lépreuse* might have remained obscure and the opera might well have been staged in 1900 were it not for the particular *fin-de-siècle* context. Elaine Showalter has noted that the terminal decades of a century suggest to many 'the death throes of a diseased society and the winding down of an exhausted culture'; she posits the notion that cultural insecurity, intimations of apocalypse and sexual anarchy prevail at such times and that, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, crises in gender-role expectations, class relations, expressions of sexuality and racial differences reinforced the climate of unease.<sup>115</sup> The underlying themes of *La Lépreuse* and responses to its central metaphor clearly demonstrate the extent to which this fear of sexual anarchy operated; however, the interrogation of these issues through the medium of opera was particularly profound. As Hutcheon and Hutcheon note:

Of all the art forms, perhaps only opera is so thoroughly dependant on suffering in general as a narrative and emotional staple. The *body*, the singing body, gives voice to the drama of the suffering *person* — in this case the sick person; in the process it also gives meaning to both the

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<sup>113</sup> According to Corbin (1982, p. 256) between 1890 and 1893, the Union syndicale des Artistes lyriques had raised successive objections to the 'trade' in singers; subsequently, in 1905 alone, they put up five thousand posters to denounce the trade. In 1906, after a campaign by André Ibels in *Le Matin*, ministerial action forbade soliciting during performances, communication between spectators and artists during performances and the overt display of available girls.

See also André Ibels, *La Traite des Chanteuses* (Paris: Félix Juven, 1906).

<sup>114</sup> See also Bernheimer (1989), pp. 159–63.

<sup>115</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992) p. 1.

disease and the one who suffers from it, meaning that includes but *supplements* the medical understanding of bodily pain.<sup>116</sup>

In its exposé of the now legally-designated crime of ‘grievous biological harm’ and in the light of contemporary millennial anxieties relating to AIDS, the themes of Lazzari’s *Lépreuse* remain vibrant. However, the extent to which Lazzari and Bataille hijacked Breton *couleur locale* to pursue an interventionist agenda demonstrates a marked development in the function of regional opera in comparison with the other works in this study. Lazzari nevertheless built on these foundations in his final Breton opera, *La Tour de feu*.

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<sup>116</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 12.

# The Lighthouse, the Siren and the Singing Rock

## *La Tour de feu*

Palais Garnier, 21 January 1928

Penmarc'h ! Voyez là bas ! Voyez la barre sombre  
Que le phare sur l'eau découpe obliquement !  
La nuit ce sont des feux, et le jour, c'est de l'ombre  
Qu'il répand sous le vaste et brumeux firmament.<sup>1</sup>

In 1849, Adolphe Adam, the composer of *Giselle*, composed a two-act opera entitled *Le Fanal* (*The Lantern*) in which the village square and port of Pornic featured as the settings for the two acts.<sup>2</sup> The lighthouse is the backdrop for a conventional love triangle in which a lighthouse keeper, Martial and his lifelong friend, Valentin, are in love with the same girl, la belle Yvonne. Although Martial, temporarily blinded by jealousy, extinguishes the lamp in an attempt to destroy his rival, all ends happily; the lovers are, in spite of various misunderstandings, constant; the envisioned shipwreck is subverted; Martial and Yvonne are united and both male protagonists share the fortune which is within their grasp.

The opera relied straightforwardly on decorative local colour but did not achieve lasting success. The reviewer in the *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* remarked that

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<sup>1</sup> ['Penmarc'h! Behold there! Behold the dark oblique line  
With which the lighthouse cuts across the sea!  
By night it sends forth flames, by day it spreads shadow  
Over the vast and murky firmament.']

A J -M. de Heredia, 'Penmarc'h', *Le Parnasse breton contemporain* (1889), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> The librettist was Henri de Saint Georges. The premiere took place at the Théâtre de l'Opéra.



‘Mademoiselle Dameron, en costume breton, est plus jolie que la ballade qu’elle chante.’<sup>3</sup>



25: Costume design for *Le Fanal*<sup>4</sup>

The image of the lighthouse, often the last bastion between land and sea is, nonetheless symbolically laden and its aesthetic and symbolic appeal has always had a particular allure for creative artists. Lighthouses have the potential to generate narratives which focus on actual and psychological distance, on claustrophobic interior space and on the elemental struggle between man and landscape or between land and sea. They stand as lonely, wavering beacons between salvation and damnation, between hope and despair and between the finite and the infinite. Moreover, their phallic outline allows them to be readily associated with masculinity

<sup>3</sup> ‘[‘Mademoiselle Dameron, in her Breton costume, is much prettier than the ballad which she sings.’]

‘Théâtre de l’Opéra : Le Fanal’, in *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 30 December 1849.

<sup>4</sup> Anonyme (vers 1849). Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra. D216 (16).



and patriarchy and to assert the schism between masculine desire and the feminine other.

Sylvio Lazzari, in his final 'Breton' opera, *La Tour de feu* (*The Fiery Tower*), exploited the symbolic potential of the lighthouse;<sup>5</sup> yet his choice and manipulation of the libretto sources reveal that the Breton markers which were deployed within the opera represented more than mere *couleur locale*. Whilst the historical setting and coastal-village topos of the dramatic action allow for the introduction of picturesque costumes and scenic features, the narrow social conventions and dominating patriarchy of an isolated community are nonetheless scrutinized.<sup>6</sup> In this work, moreover, the significance of the singing voice emerges as crucial to a full understanding of the work and the decoding of the 'phenomenal songs', which occur when protagonists knowingly and openly engage in musical performances within their on-stage world, allows the nature of music itself to be questioned.

When *La Tour de feu* was premièreed at the Palais Garnier in 1928, it made history. It was the first opera to use cinematic effects and deployed three judiciously placed screens in order to project realistic storm clouds and crashing waves. The additional spectacle was eagerly awaited by Parisian audiences and, indeed, the final act, which included a dénouement involving both a tempest and a fire, was so realistic that the reviewer in the *Revue de Paris* commented:

[...] la scène, débarrassée de ses toiles peintes, représente le déchaînement de l'Océan autour de la pointe du Raz par un film de

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<sup>5</sup> Debussy also drew on the image of the lighthouse in Act I, Scene 3 of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902). Lazzari must have been aware of this exploration of the symbolic opposition of darkness and light.

<sup>6</sup> The detailed stage directions call for the presence of a church dedicated to Our Lady of the Waves and for a *menhir* in the foreground as a 'dernier vestige de l'époque celtique' ('a last trace of the Celtic era').

tempête si merveilleusement réussi que les flocons d'écume semblent se résoudre en pluie sur les pupitres de l'orchestre.'<sup>7</sup>

However, the critic Camille Bellaigue complained laconically in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that the act had been characterized by an 'assourdissant tapage' (a deafening racket) and added wearily that:

L'incendie consécutif est préférable, ayant quelque chose de plus musical, un peu plus, que l'ouragan. Les grands désordres des éléments, du feu, de l'air ou de l'eau, sont des sujets redoutables. Il faut être Beethoven ou Wagner pour en chercher la représentation, non pas dans l'abus du matériel sonore, mais dans l'esprit, ou le génie de la musique même.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in spite of the novel scenic effects, reception was ambivalent. The established contract by which opera audiences consented to a 'willing suspension of disbelief' was doubly compromised and the hierarchical significance of voices, orchestra and stage-settings was challenged. In that final act, the work dislocated aesthetic expectations of aural boundaries since the sound and spectacle of the tempest were allowed to overwhelm the singing voices. Cinema critics equally noted technical problems: a lack of synchronicity between the visual fury of the waves and the orchestral *crescendi* and *diminuendi* that conveyed the tempest and a disconcerting central pool of light created between the two main projection-fields.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> ['... the stage, stripped of its painted canvas backdrops, recreated the unleashed violence of the ocean at the Pointe du Raz by means of a film of a storm which was so successfully depicted that foam seemed to condense and fall as raindrops on the orchestra desks.']

'Nouveautés', *La Revue de Paris*, 14 March 1928.

<sup>8</sup> ['The fire which followed was preferable; it was a little more musical, at least than the hurricane. Great elemental disorders of fire, air and water, are tricky subjects. You need to be a Beethoven or a Wagner to find the best way to represent them and (this has to be done) not by abusing sound but by (delving) into the soul or the spirit of music itself.']

Camille Bellaigue, 'Revue Musicale', *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 November 1928, p. 701.

<sup>9</sup> P. M., 'Le Cinéma à l'Opéra', *Chronique de presse*, in *La Tour de feu*, dossier d'œuvre, Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra. An incomplete diagram of the three projection screens can be found in the dossier in an extract from *L'Illustration*, 21 January 1928.

Yet, the equivocal interaction between fantasy and reality is arguably a significant element of the dramaturgical foundation of the work and, since Lazzari was on this occasion both librettist and composer, his responses to possible literary sources and to Breton topography and folklore are central to a complete understanding of the opera. In contrast with his earlier operas *Armor* and *La Lépreuse*, the work was not inspired by any particular legend and it shares an affinity with Ropartz's *Le Pays* since both works transmit a hard-edged realism in which an ambivalent Breton response to the sea can be discerned.

The dramatic action centres on the plight of a Breton lighthouse keeper, Yves, who marries his childhood sweetheart, Naïc, and who is nonetheless cuckolded before the union can be consummated. The nuances of the plot, in which the sea functions as a protagonist, as a scenic backdrop and as a musical accompaniment, allowed Lazzari, as composer and librettist, to explore the role of the ocean as a bountiful provider and as a potent force in the Breton economy. He depicted its disruptive, seductive menace as symbolic of gender difference and reiterated the mythological perception of the sea as the demarcation between what is known and secure and what is unstable and terrifying. Lazzari chose, nonetheless, to indicate a precise topos for the dramatic action; the opera is set in the lighthouse of the Pointe du Raz in Finistère in Brittany, an area with which he was familiar since family holidays had been spent at Pouldu near Douarnenez. The detailed stage directions for Act I thus provide an accurate description of the Ile de Sein:

Une petite île de pêcheurs dans l'Océan sur la côte occidentale de Bretagne. [...] Au fond, la mer. Au loin, à gauche, un phare sur un rocher.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ['A little island off the western coast of Brittany. [...] In the background is the sea. In the distance, on the left, (there is) a lighthouse upon a rock.']



26: Le Phare de La Vieille (The 'Old Woman' Lighthouse), Pointe du Raz, Finistère.

The precise location is, moreover, constantly reasserted throughout the work and used variously to define the professional identity of the male protagonist, Yves, to function as a trope for patriarchal domination and to indicate gender conflict and the incongruity of the *gardien*'s marriage to Naïc: 'La plus belle fille de l'île épouse le gardien du phare du Raz.'<sup>11</sup>

The lighthouse of the Pointe was, in any event, famous in its own right. It had been relatively recently built in 1887 and had entered into Breton popular mythology. In spite of its associations with masculine toil, and dangerous endeavour, it had been ascribed a female name and personified as La Vieille (The Old Woman). During part of the time when Lazzari was engaged on the score, it was, moreover, at the centre of public attention because of the 'Affaire des Corses' which concerned the plight of two veterans of the First World War, Mandoloni and Terraci, who had been assigned

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<sup>11</sup> ['The most beautiful girl on the island is marrying the lighthouse keeper of the Raz.']

to lighthouse duties on the Raz.<sup>12</sup> Although their employment was a ‘reserved occupation’, the two Corsicans, who both suffered from drastically reduced pulmonary capacity as a result of war injuries, were required to climb daily the one hundred and twenty steps of the tower to trim the light which, at that time, was operated manually; they were further required to perform agonising acrobatics when the relief boat arrived.<sup>13</sup> It may have been this social injustice which intensified Lazzari’s interest in the lighthouse and which led him to the narrative which Philippe le Stum has posited as the likely libretto source, the 1900 novella by the Breton writer Anatole Le Braz, *Le Gardien du feu*.<sup>14</sup>

### The First Libretto Source

The novella concerns the love of a taciturn lighthouse keeper for his lively, capricious wife.<sup>15</sup> The lighthouse keeper, Goulven Dénès, is stolid, dependable and dutiful, ideally suited to the isolation of his profession and the archetypal dupe. His wife, Adèle, in contrast, craves diversion; she cannot adjust to loneliness and succumbs to an affair with her cousin, a man with whom the antisocial Goulven has also forged a bond of masculine comradeship. She conducts the affair indiscreetly in the grace-and-favour house on the mainland whilst her husband is absent in the lighthouse. When he is disabused about his wife’s fidelity by a jealous neighbour, Goulven takes a

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<sup>12</sup> [‘The Affair of the Corsicans’] The two *gardiens* were assigned to their duties in June and November 1925.

[http://www.bretagne.com/fr/patrimoine/patrimoine\\_maritime/phares/finistere/la\\_vieille](http://www.bretagne.com/fr/patrimoine/patrimoine_maritime/phares/finistere/la_vieille) (Accessed 7 September 2006).

<sup>13</sup> In addition to their lung injuries, one lighthouse keeper suffered from severed arm muscles and the other had a floating bullet which had not proved amenable to surgical removal. On finding that their occupation was no sinecure, the men unsuccessfully bombarded the authorities with requests to be removed.

<sup>14</sup> Philippe Le Stum, ‘La Tour de feu’ in *La Bretagne à l’Opéra* (Quimper: Musée Départemental Breton, 1994), p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> Anatole Le Braz, *Le Gardien du feu* (Paris: Nelson, Calmann-Lévy, 1929).

laboriously plotted revenge and the narrative itself takes the form of the official log in which the lighthouse keeper minutely details the events at the lighthouse for his superior. The acute tension of the narrative derives from its accurate characterization, from the steady aggregation of clues which indicate the clandestine affair to the reader, if not immediately to the hapless *gardien*, and ultimately from the anticipation of the fate which will be meted out to the erring lovers by the vengeful husband.

The autograph score of *La Tour de feu* indicates four dates of composition throughout 1925.<sup>16</sup> Lazzari's usual recourse to the original author as the librettist of choice was thus perhaps not possible since Le Braz died in 1926 and was already ailing in 1925;<sup>17</sup> this may have prompted the composer's decision to provide his own libretto. However, as Anselm Gerhard has noted, by the end of the nineteenth century, the precarious, often contentious relationship between composer and librettist and the troublesome balance of their division of labour were increasingly and honourably resolved by the elimination of the independent librettist's role:

[...] Wagner's theoretical writings brought about a shift of opinion, persuading many that librettos by the composer must have a higher aesthetic worth. Writing both text and music seemed the only way to preserve composers from the bad habits of notoriously unsympathetic librettists.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the avoidance of the services of a professional librettist accrued benefits that exceeded considerations of aesthetic merit. For, whilst Lazzari remained faithful to

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<sup>16</sup> The dates are: 10 mars (March) 1925 (p. 1), Suresnes, le 27 mars (March) 1925 (p. 217), Suresnes, le 2 juin (June) 1925 (p. 336) and Moulin de la Sault-Covilly, 6 août (August) 1925 (p. 588). B.N. Opéra [Rés. A 722a].

<sup>17</sup> Lazzari used the services of professional librettists for his other operas: the librettist of *Armor* (1895) was Ernest Jaubert; *La Lépreuse* (see previous chapter) set Henry Bataille's drama of the same name; the librettist of *Le Sauteriot* (1918) was the German poet Keyserling and *Melaenis* (1927) used an adaptation by Georges Spitzmuller of a poem by Louis Bouilhet.

<sup>18</sup> Gerhard (1998), p. 327.



certain elements of Le Braz' narrative and thereby secured an authentic Breton identity for the work, the plot was manipulated and the original narrative was significantly altered in a manner which was unlikely to have been approved by its creator. In part, these manipulations account for the inevitable problems which might have arisen from the direct transfer of Le Braz' novella to the lyric stage. The dramatic tension, achieved in the novella by the means of a first-person narrative which is transmitted as a laboriously, minutely-detailed account of psychological disintegration in which every slowly-unfolding nuance of character and action is significant, would not have been readily transferable to the opera stage. Equally, the lovers' death — they are locked in a room in the lighthouse, out of sight and hearing, to meet a horrific and lingering end whilst the *gardien* meticulously records their slow demise — did not lend itself to operatic treatment. The 'walled-up-alive' scenario had already been notably deployed by Verdi. Moreover, the lovers in *Le Gardien du feu* are flawed and venal, they lack the noble stature and the dignified resignation of Aïda and Radamès; they rail against their fate and their death is pitiful rather than heroically tragic.

However, other additions and alterations introduced by Lazzari indicate that *Le Gardien du feu* was not the unique libretto source and that the composer's pursuit of innovation and realism was compromised by another dislocating agenda. The contemporary setting of the stone lighthouse was, for example, jettisoned; Lazzari retained the precise topos of the Pointe du Raz but elected to site the work historically in the seventeenth century so that the lighthouse in the opera is, improbably, a wooden structure which is visually more reminiscent of an inland windmill, but which can nevertheless be conveniently and convincingly immolated in the final act.



27: Act II. The lighthouse.<sup>19</sup>

The seventeenth-century setting also allowed for the introduction of picturesque Breton costumes and accounted for alterations to the identities of the female protagonist and to the *deus ex machina* who provokes the final tragedy. The character of the *gardien* nevertheless remained unchanged; Yves in the opera is reliable, loyal and trusting, steadfast in his love for Naïc and loyal to his treacherous best friend, the pilot, Yann. Even the costume sketches by Maxime-Pierre Dethomas demonstrate the keeper's stalwart but implacable masculine qualities and the similarities between Yves and the protagonist of the novella, Goulven, are undeniable.

The opera opens with the Breton wedding celebrations which mark the union of Naïc and Yves. In the midst of the festivities, however, the arrival of a mysterious vessel and a glamorous, exotic stranger, Don Jacintho, disturbs the general merriment. The

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<sup>19</sup> Scène photo, dossier d'œuvre, *La Tour de feu*, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra.

jealous pilot Yann, who is also in love with Naïc, warns the newcomer that she is unavailable:

YANN

La fauvette est tombée aux mains de l'oiseleur !  
De fortes mains, Seigneur ! [...] <sup>20</sup>  
Dans une heure il la met en cage.

Don Jacintho, however, noting the disparity between the stolid *gardien* and the beautiful, but ethereal Naïc, determines to intervene. Yet although the opera plot and the narrative of the novella thus focus on conventional love triangles, they nevertheless diverge.

In Le Braz's narrative, the disparity between the protagonists, between the 'otherness' of Adèle and the stolidity of Goulven, is ascribed to precise ethnic contrasts within Brittany as much as to gender conflict. The novella reveals sophisticated nuances of tribal cohesion and ethnic belonging which acknowledge the cultural complexity and social divisions of the province rather than focusing on the broad, general regional stereotypes of the kind which are often the basis for the deployment of *couleur locale*. Goulven is thus warned by his mother: ' Tu prends femme hors de ta race; puisses-tu n'avoir pas à t'en repentir.'<sup>21</sup> He is, moreover, a Léon, a member of the Breton race noted for its seriousness, religious devotion and rejection of worldly pleasures, so that masculinity, in the novella is aligned with restraint, with social inhibition and ultimately with acute fear of the feminine other:

Je suis né de cette race austère des laboureurs du Léon, dont la religion est le souci suprême. Mon enfance fut sérieuse et un peu triste. Là-bas, point de chansons, ni de danses, ni de ces jeux qui égayaient la vie. Je ne

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<sup>20</sup> ['The little sparrow is already in the bird catcher's clutches! (In his) strong grip, by God! In an hour's time he'll put her in a cage.']

<sup>21</sup> ['You are taking a wife who is not of your race; may you never live to regret it.']  
Le Braz (1929), p. 27.

me rappelle de ce passé que des bruits des prières et des sonneries des cloches tintant des offices.<sup>22</sup>

Adèle, in contrast, is a *Trégorroise*,<sup>23</sup> a spinner of dreams whose romantic ideals will inevitably be disappointed by Goulven, the failed seminarist: 'elle avait à un degré surprenant l'esprit fécond et la verve ingénieuse de sa race. Sa fantaisie, tout naturellement, créait des merveilles.'<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, her elaborate imaginings, which initially cast her innocently as a captive princess, become progressively and explicitly sexual until her elemental nature is obliquely declared; she presents her plan to illicitly relieve Goulven's lonely tour of duty in the lighthouse, for example, as an erotic adventure:

Tu me recevrais dans tes bras et vite tu m'emporterais pour me sécher, là-haut, dans la chambre ardente. Et après ... après je t'aimerais à la barbe de l'administration, passionnément [...]. Endormie, j'aurai des rêves singuliers, comme d'habiter les eaux profondes et d'être l'épouse immortelle de quelque génie sous-marin, de quelque Morgan, maître de la mer.<sup>25</sup>

Goulven's response, one of profound fear of the feminine other and thus of loss of sexual and psychological control, reinforces the allegory which presents the eternal feminine as an enigmatic sea spirit capable of wilful, unregulated physical metamorphoses and intent upon the dilution of masculine mastery and the destruction of patriarchal hegemony.

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<sup>22</sup>['I was born of that austere race of working men from Léon for whom religion is the prime concern. My childhood was serious and somewhat sad. There (there were) neither songs nor dances nor the games which brighten up daily life. All I remember of my past is the sound of prayers and of bells ringing out the daily offices.']

Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> She is also from Brittany, but from Trégor.

<sup>24</sup>['She had, to a surprising degree, the fertile imagination and inventive liveliness of her race. Her fantasies created marvels.']

Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>25</sup>['You'd take me in your arms and you'd quickly carry me off to dry me up in the lamp room. And after ... after, I'd make love to you passionately under your bosses' noses. When I had fallen asleep, I would have strange dreams of living in the ocean depths and of being the immortal bride of a sea spirit, of some Morgan, master of the sea.']

Elle parlait ainsi de sa voix de sirène avec des insinuations qui me troublaient jusqu'aux moelles. [...] Par peur de céder, je faisais celui qui ne veut pas entendre.<sup>26</sup>

In the opera, however, Naïc's otherness is not accounted for by parochial or ethnic difference. Yet, when Don Jacintho questions the origins of the bride, Yann reveals:

Voici déjà dix-sept années qu'une nuit d'ouragan, un navire inconnu vint se briser sur la Pointe du Raz.  
Le lendemain, à marée basse, dans les filets du gardien du phare, on découvrit une jolie petite fille à qui l'eau n'avait fait aucun mal, comme si c'était son élément.  
Elle a grandi dans notre île avec les filles du pays, mais on comprend qu'elle n'est pas des nôtres.<sup>27</sup>

Naïc, then, is not a *raconteuse* of fairy tales; she has no need to cast herself at the centre of a self-constructed drama since her own identity is apparently that of a legendary creature from another world who is constrained to negotiate the chasm between the beyond and the real. This identity is, moreover, consistently confirmed; not only does she repeatedly assert her love for the sea, but Yves declares at the very beginning of the opera:

Quand je te vois ainsi dressée devant moi et cambrée comme une sirène,  
je suis inquiet, j'ai peur qu'un jour la mer vienne te reprendre et t'arracher de mes bras.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> ['She spoke thus in her siren's voice with its nuances and inflections which troubled me right to the very heart of my existence. For fear of giving in, I did something which shouldn't be spoken of.'] Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> ['It was seventeen years ago when, one stormy night,  
A strange ship came to grief on the Pointe du Raz.  
In the morning, at low tide, in the lighthouse keeper's nets, they discovered a pretty little girl, unharmed by the sea, as if it was her element.  
She grew up on the island with the girls of our own village  
But we have always understood that she is not one of ours.']

<sup>28</sup> ['When I see you before me with your back arched like a siren  
I am afraid, I fear that one day the ocean will come and tear you from my arms.']

Unlike Adèle, therefore, who merely assumes the role of the siren as part of a sexual fantasy, Naïc is identified by various members of the village community as an actual 'creature of the waves' and a manifestation of 'la femme de l'Autre Monde' who is central to Celtic mythology.<sup>29</sup> Sirens are conventionally presented in folklore and legend as serpentine and metamorphous; they are beautiful, seductive and enchanting, capable of achieving the spiritual damnation of the men whom they encounter in their search for an immortal soul, primed for creating social havoc and prone to returning to their natural element and thus to watery disappearances. The tragic ending of the opera arguably derives, then, as much from a predestined mythical conflict as from the errors of flawed humanity. Indeed the mythical references of the opera are significant since a renowned variant of the Celtic legend which recounts the story of 'la femme de l'Autre Monde' is that of Mélusine, the daughter of Morgane. Mélusine is, however, not merely the offspring of Morgane, the daughter of the waves; she is also associated, in her own right, with towers and with wells, the allegorical signifiers of the phallus and the womb.<sup>30</sup> The opera title, which rejects the conventional French word for lighthouse, 'le phare', in favour of 'la tour', insists, therefore, on an established symbol of masculine hegemony, whilst the dramatic action plumbs the nuances of multiple folkloric references in its exploration of the polar opposition of the genders and of the challenges to patriarchy which are expressed in siren-songs.

The mythical sea-nymph was, in addition, as in Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's tale *Undine*,<sup>31</sup> overtly sexual yet paradoxically unearthly and the antithesis of brute force and gross humanity. Lazzari, in drawing attention to her posture, moreover, refers

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<sup>29</sup> ['The woman from the Spirit World.']

<sup>30</sup> See J. Le Goff and E. le Roy Ladurie, 'Mélusine maternelle et défricheuse', *Annales* (1971), pp. 587–603.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1807) *Undine* (New York: Blakeman and Mason, 1864).



directly to a nineteenth-century paradigm which, in the paintings of the *fin de siècle*, consistently represented nymphs and *ondines* as supine, arched and writhing in ecstasy. As Bram Dijkstra notes:

Naiads and woodland nymphs with apparently self-inflicted broken backs became a staple of the Paris salon exhibitions, especially between the period between 1880 and 1914. [...] Even if the artists' excuse for painting their nude and sprawled bodies was to show them as the personification of 'the wave' or 'the breeze' or 'Aphrodite', they always seemed to suffer the same harsh spinal distortion.<sup>32</sup>

Dijkstra nonetheless distinguishes between portrayals of the *ondines* and representations of sirens, perceiving the twisted and broken *ondine's* posture as an invitation to rape which is in direct contrast to the vicious, predatory intent of the siren:

[...] the siren was quite the opposite of the eminently ravishable *ondine*. [...] She was not the cultured pearl of modern, passive femininity but the dangerous, brutal, atavistic child of the sea's cold watery womb.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dijkstra (1986), p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 258.



28: Fernand LeQuesne, 1890, *La Légende de Kerdeck*, oil on canvas, Musée des beaux arts, Quimper.<sup>34</sup>

Lazzari nevertheless conflates the attributes of the siren and the *ondine* in the character of Naïc. Throughout the first two acts, she demonstrates a disarming innocence, an inclination to *rêverie* and an unwillingness to confront either Yann's disruptive sexual jealousy or Yves's fantasies of control and possession. Her incarceration in the lighthouse is allegorically significant; it denotes not only her submission to patriarchal control, but equally asserts the psychomachic despair of the *ondine*; she is poised between the world of the flesh and that of the spirit, subject to the polar seductions of both land and sea and yet nonetheless prevented from accessing the psychological benefits of either locus of belonging.

<sup>34</sup> Fernand LeQuesne, (1856 –1932) The painting depicts the seduction, by *ondines*, of a Breton *binou* player.

Naïc’s duality is, moreover, musically asserted. As the ‘half-shy, half-trusting’ *ondine*,<sup>35</sup> her uncomplicated relationship with the sea is rhythmically projected; when Yann declares that she is the ‘child of the ocean’, a syncopated triplet accompaniment figure mimics the regular, untroubled movement of waves (Example 1, bars 3–6).

The musical score is for Act I, 'She is a child of the Ocean.' (VS, p. 65). It is in 3/4 time and features a vocal line for Yann and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: 'Est-elle née ici? Non! C'est u-ne fil-le de l'O-cé-an. Voi-ci dé-jà dix-sept an-nées qu'u-ne'. The piano accompaniment features a syncopated triplet figure in the right hand, which mimics the regular, untroubled movement of waves. The score is marked 'Animé (♩ = 138)' and 'Plus animé'. The tempo changes from 'Poco rit.' to 'a Tempo'.

Example 1: Act I. ‘She is a child of the Ocean.’ (VS, p. 65)

Naïc is also associated with key of A major, a key used consistently in the opera to project happiness; however, the wellbeing which emanates from the expression of her siren-self is more usually projected by the dominant of that key, E major. Her declaration of love for Yves — the platonic love that she has innocently mistaken for

<sup>35</sup> La Motte Fouqué (1864), p. 8.

passion — thus initially makes use of the bright (A) major colouring in association with a conventional, lyrical love theme; the pull of the sharper key nevertheless suggests that the ecstatic prediction of happiness is, perhaps, naïve:

Example 2: Act I. ‘But who else would I love, poor Yves, if not you?’ (VS, p. 26).

However, when intimations of her siren-identity intrude upon the idyll, her destabilizing qualities are manifest in the chromatic treatment which relies on juxtaposed or overlapping harmonic fields. When Yves responds to her ‘siren posture’, his confusion (Example 3, bar 4) is conveyed in the immediate proximity of an A flat major chord to an A major tonic chord in which, in addition, the false relations implied by the juxtaposed E and E flat aptly suggest the duality of the siren. The overlapping harmonic fields persist, moreover, until Yves’ anxiety is openly declared:

The image displays a musical score for Act I, featuring three systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (Na. or Yv.) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in French. The first system shows Na. singing 'leu - ses!.. YVES Quand je te vois ain - si dres.' with musical markings 'Poco rit.' and 'Tempo I?'. The second system shows Yv. singing 'sé - e devant moi et cam - brée comme u - ne si - rè - ne, je suis in -' with a 'cresc.' marking. The third system shows Yv. singing 'quiet, j'ai peur qu'un jour la mer vien.ne te re -' with 'dim.' and 'p' markings. The piano accompaniment consists of arpeggiated chords and rhythmic patterns.

Example 3: Act I. 'When I see you standing before me with your back arched like a siren, I worry that, one day, the sea will come to snatch you away.' (VS, p. 22)

Naïc's transition from *ondine* to siren is, in addition, signalled by the symbolic significance of her hair. In legend and in *fin de siècle* iconography, the sexual incontinence of the siren is asserted by unbound hair and the urgency of her invitation to dalliance is conventionally augmented by the act of combing wild and abundant tresses. Freud had established the link between hair and sexuality by indicating that, whilst evolution had gradually reduced the functionality of hair as an aid to physical survival, its presence would always trigger reminiscences of primeval animal



instincts.<sup>36</sup> However, Carol de Dobay Rifelj has also noted that the nineteenth-century French novel consistently developed new ways of extending ‘the language of hair’ in order to demonstrate that: ‘Women whose hair is attached, coiffed, molded, mounted on wires, augmented with hairpieces, have been “pacified”. Otherwise the woman is uncontrolled and perhaps uncontrollable, powerful, dangerous.’<sup>37</sup>

Naïc’s hair is thus a crucial factor in Don Jacintho’s erotic response to her dance; as he follows her progress across the floor, he murmurs ‘Ces yeux ardents, cette chevelure de feu’.<sup>38</sup> Equally, at the beginning of Act II, when Naïc has postponed the consummation of her marriage to Yves, her loosened hair allegorically conveys her passion for Don Jacintho; it presages the jettison of the marital bond which unites her to Yves and the emergence of the true, siren-self which lurks beneath the civilized veneer.

#### NAÏC

Puisque personne ne me voit, je veux dénouer ma chevelure,  
Ma coiffe me pèse comme un cercle de fer.

*(Elle enlève sa coiffe et dénoue ses cheveux. Elle prend quelques boucles dans sa main, les caresse et les contemple.)*

Ma chevelure !  
Comme cet étranger l’a admirée !  
‘Chevelure ondine’ murmura-t-il  
‘Chevelure royale, digne d’une couronne !’<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Katherine Bergeron, ‘Mélisande’s Hair, or the Trouble in Allemonde’ in Mary Ann Smart, ed., *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 169.

<sup>37</sup> Carol de Dobay Rifelj, ‘The Language of Hair in the Nineteenth-Century Novel’, *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, 32.1 (2003), pp. 83–96.

<sup>38</sup> [‘Those burning eyes! That fiery hair!’]

<sup>39</sup> [‘Since no one can see me, I want to take my hair down  
My coiffe weighs me down like an iron band.

*(She takes off her coiffe and loosens her hair. She takes several ringlets in her hand, strokes them and looks at them)*

My hair!

How the stranger admired it!

The hair of a nymph, he murmured.

Royal hair, worthy of a crown!’]



The overwhelming ‘sorcery’ of unbound hair is musically transmitted when Don Jacintho surprises Naïc without her *coiffe* and pleads with her to leave her hair down. The tonal uncertainty introduced by the chromatically descending bass line aptly suggests ‘undoing’; equally, the word-painting implicit in the spread chords which depict rippling tresses deploys a D major chord with a flattened seventh and major ninth. This harmonic strategy, one adopted by Debussy for moments of ecstasy, is reinforced by Don Jacintho’s entry via a series of half-diminished chords whose unstable qualities reflect the danger evoked by the loosened locks.

*(Naïc s'aperçoit que Don Jacintho regarde fixement, avec admiration, sa chevelure dénouée. Elle tressaille et rassemble ses*

*cheveux pour se coiffer. Don Jacintho se rapproche d'elle)*  
 (Yann se retire.) DON JACINTHO (*avec douceur*)

Lais - sez, je vous en  
 Poco meno mosso (♩=76)

*p ma marc.*

Example 4: Act II. Naïc notices that Don Jacintho is staring in admiration at her unpinned hair (VS, p. 148).

The atavistic, psycho-sexual significance of hair is, in addition, conflated with references to the traditional, feminine Breton headdress. Dethomas’ sketch for Naïc’s costume, indeed, makes full and accurate provision for the *coiffe*, which has always

been a prime marker, not merely of Breton feminine identity but also of ethnic difference within the province. During the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, distinct lace patterns and headdresses emphasized parochial divisions and explicitly asserted social cohesion or exclusion; the ethnologist René-Yves Creston has, moreover, noted the diversity of designs in recording sixty-six regional variants.<sup>40</sup> Dethomas' costume design for Naïc, in addition, seems to recall the regionally-specific description of Adèle Lézurec's headdress in Le Braz' *Le Gardien du feu*:

Je suivis des yeux jusqu'à ce qu'elles fussent effacées dans l'éloignement du mail, la blancheur claire de sa cornette à deux pointes et la nuance gris-perle de son grand châle à franges.<sup>41</sup>



29: Costume design for Naïc<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> René-Yves Creston, *Costume Breton* (Éditions Coop Breizh, 1993).

<sup>41</sup> ['My eyes followed the clear whiteness of her double-pointed winged headdress and her large, fringed pearl-grey shawl until they were lost in the distance along the path.'] Le Braz (1929), p. 16.

The stages of the progression of male desire from its first kindling through to its accelerated urgency and the moment of its fulfilment are, indeed, successively recorded in the narrative of the libretto source by precise references to the *coiffe*. After the first glimpse of the object of desire, resplendent in her Sunday attire, Goulven's growing passion is, for example, demonstrated by his response to Adèle's workaday headdress:

[S]a coiffe mince, épinglée au-dessus du front, laissait à découvert les épais bandeaux des ses cheveux d'un noir bleuâtre, qu'elle portait en bourrelets sur les tempes, à la manière des Trégorroises. [...] Cette femme dont, la veille encore, j'ignorais l'existence, j'aurais voulu la saisir d'un bond, l'étreindre, l'entraîner comme une proie.<sup>43</sup>

Subsequently, the allegorical significance of the liberation of feminine hair from the constraining *coiffe* as the incitement to desire and sexual possession becomes apparent when the consummation of the marriage is imminent:

Lorsque j'y pénétrai, elle était au miroir, qui défaisait sa coiffure. La cornette ôtée, ses lourds cheveux s'épandirent, l'enveloppèrent toute d'un flot sombre où des clartés frissonnaient ça et là, comme des lueurs d'astres sur un étang nocturne.<sup>44</sup>

Naïc's removal of her *coiffe* in the opera is similarly symbolically laden: it signals a rejection of tribal belonging, a voluntary abandonment of conformity to conventional social norms and patriarchal restraints and the loss of sexual inhibition. Since the

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<sup>42</sup> Maxime-Pierre Dethomas, 1928, Costumes for *La Tour de feu*, pencil and gouache, Bibliothèque Musée de l'Opéra, D 216 (84).

<sup>43</sup> ['Her narrow *coiffe* which was pinned above her brow, revealed the heavy loops of her blue-black hair which she wore in ringlets on her temples in the manner of the women of Trégor. This woman whose existence had, as recently as yesterday, been unknown to me, I wanted to seize her in a single movement, overcome her and carry her off as if she were my prey.']  
Le Braz (1929), p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> ['When I went in (to the bedroom), she was at the mirror, undoing her hair. Her pointed *coiffe* had been taken off [and] her heavy locks spread out and enveloped her like a dark wave where highlights shimmered here and there like starlight on a nocturnal lake.']  
Ibid., p. 30.

traditional headdress was then, as now, associated with major religious festivals and rites of passage, its abandonment equally indicates that the unruly spirit of the clandestine siren will no longer be bound by conventional spiritual restraints or religious doctrines. The dramatic action of the opera, moreover, subverts the allegorical significance of the *coiffe* which emerges from the libretto source; whereas the contrast between the contained or unbound hair of the female protagonist in the novella functions as a signifier of masculine sexual obsession and as the preliminary to quasi violent, exclusive physical and spiritual possession, the references to the headdress in *La Tour* initiate a subliminal social commentary which inversely signifies the triumph of the feminine self.

When Naïc removes her *coiffe*, her act of unveiling is thus an allegory of shifts in the hegemonic gender-role expectations which informed the contemporary social context of the opera's conception. Not only were the years between the *fin de siècle* and 1925 those in which women were literally liberated from restricting fashions and in which the medical dangers of corsets and the inconvenience of drawers were openly declared,<sup>45</sup> but they witnessed the growth of feminism and the reappraisal of the erstwhile misogyny which had cast women as irredeemably inferior and dangerously other. Elaine Showalter's interrogation of the unveiling of Salome in art, theatre and opera raises concerns that are equally applicable to Naïc's rejection of the headdress:

What happens when women choose to unveil themselves in defiance or seduction? Female self-unveiling can be a shocking act, for female unveiling substitutes power for castration. From the feminist point of view, the woman behind the veil might not only be splendid but perhaps *normal*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ludovic O'Followell published *Le Corset, Etude Médicale* in 1908. It indicates that the restricting garment causes dyspepsia, insomnia and heartburn.

<sup>46</sup> Showalter (1992), p. 156.

The establishment of the link between the siren and newly-assertive female sexuality, however, becomes ever clearer as the work progresses; it is, for example, proclaimed initially by a sinuous dance which first occurs as the wedding procession leaves the inn. Lazzari's stage directions indicate that the dancers are 'en farandole'; however, since the farandole is a chain dance more commonly associated with southern France and Provence, it seems likely that he deployed the term generically to account for a group dance which does not conform to any particular, organized choreographic figuration but which is instantly capable of conveying local colour.<sup>47</sup> However, the designated dance is accurate in that the farandole in *La Tour* resembles the traditional Breton *ronde* which always formed part of peasant and bourgeois regional wedding celebrations. Both dances demand that the dancers are linked physically by held hands, ribbons or handkerchiefs and both assert social cohesion by allowing for the participation of the entire social group; both dances are equally of the 'follow-my leader' type and only differ because the farandole dancers successively form arches through which the rest of the chain passes, whereas in the Breton *ronde* the dancers form an unruly and approximate circle.<sup>48</sup> Since, in the opera, the male wedding guests are initially carrying coloured lanterns held aloft on long poles, the female members of the bridal procession are necessarily the only on-stage participants capable of suggesting the linked figuration which a farandole or *ronde* requires. The women in the procession, then, are proactive participants in the dance; the men are grouped on each side of the stage as bystanders whose function is reduced to providing decorative lighting whilst the female chorus dominate the dramatic action and physically surround the bridal couple.

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<sup>47</sup> 'Farandole', *Grove Music Online* (Accessed 15 November 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Michel Guilcher, cited in *Musique Bretonne* (1996), p. 147, notes five significant Breton folk-dance genres.

# DANSES

Animé (♩ = 152)



Example 5: Act I. The Farandole (VS, p. 48).

The music for the wedding farandole, indeed, seems to juxtapose strident masculinity with a sinuous, feminine other. Against the opening accompaniment of bare octaves<sup>49</sup> an exotic, chromatic line is provided as the dance melody; the music thus directly mirrors the on-stage gender-groups and hints at feminine ambivalence countered by masculine control and attempted containment. The contrast between the gendered groups is arguably similarly transmitted in the second dance where markedly rhythmic antecedent and consequent motifs reinforce an impression of unresolved conflict conveyed by alternating *piano* and *forte* dynamics, by the contrast in textures

<sup>49</sup> Lazzari uses this device to signify masculinity in Act II in the Fishermen's Song when the cries of 'Ohé' (Ahoy) are similarly set to open octaves.



and pitch of the responding motifs and by the circular nature of the melodic line.

However, as the dance becomes more frantic, the serpentine farandole is reasserted.



Example 6: Act I. The Second Dance (VS, p. 51).

The farandole also introduces the folk song of the female wedding guests which, in spite of its quaintness and C mixolydian inflection, is equally erotically charged and transmits the notion that female sexuality menaces its opposing, masculine other. The insistent, predatory nature of the women is suggested by overlapping, imitative entries indicative of urgency and amplified by the stage directions: the choir is divided into two distinct groups of young and older women who are positioned at the right and left-hand sides of the bridal couple respectively and who challenge each other as follows:

JEUNES FILLES:

Ma mère, il me faut un mari  
 Donnez-moi un petit mari  
 Un tout petit mari chéri  
 Pour qu'il me conduise à la danse !

FEMMES :

Ma fille, attends encore un an.

JEUNES FILLES:

Un an est si long !

FEMMES:

Un an est si court !

JEUNES FILLES:

Mais je mourrai d'impatience, assurément.<sup>50</sup>

The scenario is repeated three times as the suggested interval is successively reduced from a year to a month, from a month to a week and, finally, to a day. At this point, the young girls declare that they are likely to die of heartache and the sung dialogue continues:

FEMMES:

Ma fille, les maris sont rares !  
Pour un homme il y a deux filles !

JEUNES FILLES:

Tant pis ! Il me faut un mari  
Un tout petit mari chéri !  
Et, si pour aller à la danse je n'en ai pas un tout entier, je serai bien me contenter d'une moitié !<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> ['Mother, I need a husband  
Give me a little husband!  
A little sweetie who will take me to the dance!  
Wait another year my girl!

But I will surely die of impatience!']

<sup>51</sup> ['My daughter, husbands are scarce  
For every man there are two girls!

Who cares! I need a man!  
A darling little man!  
And if I haven't got a whole one to dance with  
I know how to make do with a half!']

Les Jeunes Filles

**CHŒUR**

**SOPR.**  
Ma mère, il me faut un ma - ri, Don - nez-moi

**CONTR.**  
Ma mère, il me faut un ma - ri, Don - nez -

**les J.F.**  
un pe-tit ma - ri, Un tout pe - tit ma - ri ché.

moi un pe - tit ma - ri, Un tout pe - tit ma -

**les J.F.**  
*cresc.*  
ri, Pour qu'il me con - dui - se à la dan - se.

ri ché - ri, Pour qu'il me con - dui - se à la dan - se.

*cresc.*

Example 7: Act I. 'Mother, I need a husband!' (VS, p. 37).

The expression of aggressive female sexuality is further reinforced as the women advance progressively towards the front of the stage with each successive verse of the song; only when the front of the stage is dominated by their presence do they divide and take male partners for the two dances; the stage directions require that they seize their partners *brusquement* (abruptly). The element of menace in the ensuing farandole and its triumph over the abortive attempts to curb its exuberance in the second dance thus support Dijkstra's suggestion that dancing women, for creative artists associated with the *fin de siècle*, could be suspect because: 'The culprit behind woman's uncontrollable urge to dance was [...] her tendency to hysteria.';<sup>52</sup> this hysteria, he posits, was widely perceived as evidence of dangerous erotic tendencies.

The bride's attendants are, moreover, prominent in the finale of the first act since the *jeunes filles* prepare the bride for the journey to the lighthouse and sing a valedictory chorus to invoke safety for the bridal couple from real and psychological tempests and to plead for the groom's continuing fidelity. The prominence of the female chorus in the first act thus echoes Lazzari's treatment of the *lavandières* in his previous opera *La Lépreuse* and similarly comments obliquely on changing social responses to polarized gender-roles; moreover, whilst the bridesmaids conventionally act as a foil to the bride, they also presage her siren tendencies, thus supporting Catherine Clément's suggestion that:

In this operatic world, even if the men are the rulers, there is a space for women. What happens in a chorus is full of meaning: either archaic and forbidden to women, or open to them and thus advocating progress.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Dijkstra (1986), p. 243.

<sup>53</sup> Catherine Clément, 'Through Voices, History' in Mary Ann Smart, ed., *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 21.

Yet if the insertion of the siren into the opera plot allowed Lazzari to explore shifting attitudes to gender-role expectations via the fractured and doomed marital relationship of two disparate individuals, it also nonetheless indicates that Le Braz's *Le Gardien du feu* cannot have been the unique libretto source. The hard-edged realism of Le Braz' 'lighthouse tale' is dislocated, in the opera, by the overlay of folkloric elements. Nevertheless, the decoding of Naïc's phenomenal wedding song reveals both the 'hidden' libretto source and an insistent social commentary. Before Naïc sings at the wedding, the age-old significance of the siren's voice is reiterated and the singing feminine voice is asserted as a trope for virginity and yet, paradoxically, as a signifier of dangerously unrestrained female sexuality. Yann tells Don Jacintho:

Les vieilles femmes du village prétendent que Naïc est une enfant  
d'ondine.  
On le croirait quand on entend sa voix.  
Mais vous allez l'entendre.  
Aujourd'hui la sirène va nous chanter sa dernière chanson.  
[...] après leur mariage nos filles cessent de chanter.  
C'est une antique coutume de notre île silencieuse.<sup>54</sup>

The social imperative to nullify feminine song, however, indicates that a second literary source, hitherto completely ignored, actually informed Lazzari's libretto.

### The Second Libretto Source

Amongst Anatole Le Braz' output, a lesser known short story, *Le Sang de la sirène* (*The Siren's Blood*), was published in 1901, the year after *Le Gardien du feu*. The

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<sup>54</sup> ['The old ladies of the village claim that Naïc is an ondine's child.  
You can believe it when you hear her voice.  
[...] Today the siren will sing her last song.  
After marriage, our girls don't sing.  
It is an old custom of our silent island.']

narrative recounts the events surrounding the meeting between a sailor and a mysterious, young married woman, whose bloodline can reputedly be traced to a noted race of sirens who are forever destined to bring ill fortune to those with whom they are intimately associated. When the narrator of this story asks the lovely Marie-Ange, the female protagonist, to sing, he is also informed:

Dans notre île, après le mariage, les femmes ne chantent plus ... plus jamais ! ... Si ce n'est le dimanche, à l'église.<sup>55</sup>

The legend of the siren is, moreover, recounted in a manner which makes the links between the opera libretto and the narrative clear. Thus the sailor is, for example, informed that Marie-Ange's ancestress came to the island because 'l'homme de Cadoran la pêcha dans ses filets' ('the man from Cadoran caught her in his fishing nets'); her miraculous arrival exactly mirrors that of Naïc and she is, with her fellow sirens, similarly predisposed to sing:

Leur principale occupation était de chanter. Elles chantaient des choses douces, de longs appels d'amour, propres à séduire le cœur des jeunes hommes.<sup>56</sup>

This short work, then, is clearly the second libretto source; literary and narrative elements from both of Le Braz's novellas account for much of the plot of *La Tour de feu*. However, *Le Sang de la sirène* was as problematic as *Le Gardien* in terms of its potential to provide the entire material for a three-act opera plot. The pace of the dramatic action is slow and often static; the narrative content details the narrator's chance meeting with Marie-Ange, his response to her singing voice, the news of her

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<sup>55</sup> ['On our island, after marriage, women never sing, they never sing again. Unless it's on Sundays, in church.']

Anatole Le Braz, *Le Sang de la sirène* (Rennes : Terre de Brume, 2001), p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> ['Their main pastime was singing. They sang sweet songs, long love-calls, just right for seducing young men's hearts.']

Ibid., p. 38.



fisherman husband's death at sea in mysterious circumstances and her fleeting reappearance as a grief-stricken widow. The drastically reduced dramatic action allows the writer to use the symbol of the siren to introduce a supernatural element into the narrative, since the power of the story derives largely from the elusive, mysterious nature of the female protagonist.

Nevertheless, in the novella, the siren also functions as a trope for the performance of Breton mourning in those coastal districts where graveyards demonstrated clearly demarcated gender roles: the tombs of women predominated since men were perpetually lost at sea. The song of the siren thus stands as the exegesis of the allure of the beckoning ocean and the quasi-sexual relationship between the seafaring Breton male and the sea which is, indeed, a persistent theme in Le Braz's output.<sup>57</sup> The exact nature of the siren song is, nevertheless, equivocal; it represents both the seductive call of the feminine other which will culminate in the emotional and material demands of hearth and home; equally it stands for the rival call of the ocean which is fatally destined to fracture those family ties.

In *Le Sang de la sirène*, Le Braz specifically uses the symbol of the legendary siren to explore the patterns of guilt, mourning and memorial which occur when the grief-object, the actual, visible and tangible corpse, is absent; the novella is a specific interrogation, for all its supernatural elements, of the real plight and commonality of women who wait in vain for a returned body on which to focus their mourning. For these nineteenth-century Breton women, the regional ritual of *proella*, which substituted a waxen image for the absent coffin, offered a physical symbol directed at

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<sup>57</sup> See Chapter 3, p. 123. Le Braz's *Pâques d'Islande* deploys a similar theme.

catharsis;<sup>58</sup> the legend of the siren, the creature born of the sea and yet capable of human affections, nevertheless, similarly allowed for the paradoxical attraction of the bountiful yet voracious, seductively menacing ocean and the countering force of human emotional bonds to be negotiated. These equivocal responses to the sea and to the feminine other, explored against an emotional backdrop of the commonality of women and opposing patriarchy, are equally vital elements in the dramatic action of the opera.

Yet, if Le Braz probed Breton mourning and the regional, funerary rite of the *proella* in the later novella, he also, and more significantly for Lazzari's libretto, explored the power of the singing female voice, its elusive, transgressive qualities and its consequential containment and subjection to patriarchal control. Central to this examination is an assessment of the significance of the feminine voice as an actual phenomenal sound, which is heard physically, and as a noumenal echo, which is registered beyond normal aural thresholds and which nevertheless evokes reminiscences of a primeval animal existence. When the narrator hears Marie-Ange sing in church, his ambivalent response demonstrates a celebration of the eternal feminine but also reinforces the sexual significance of voice and hair which are notable elements in Lazzari's libretto:

Pas de doute possible: celle qui chante de la sorte, c'est Marie-Ange. Je ne la distingue point parmi ses compagnes et, néanmoins, *je la vois*. Je la vois dans le passé des légendes. Elle est redevenue l'Océanide, l'être inconstant et divin, né des rêves de l'humanité primitive dans les lointains illuminés de la mer. Elle s'avance au rythme des vagues. Ses yeux glauques laissent transparaître les mystérieux fonds de roches où s'élaborèrent, à l'aube du monde, les premiers germes de la vie. Sa

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<sup>58</sup> Le Braz (2001), p. 47.

chevelure, à demi végétale, exhale un parfum si fort que tout l'univers en est embaumé. [...] Elle est une et multiple.<sup>59</sup>

The link between female sexuality and voice is moreover made explicit at the end of the passage. The sailor declares: 'Tout en elle est harmonie. [...] Son corps entier n'est qu'une chanson.'<sup>60</sup> Musical vocabulary is thus used to assert the seductive and sensual appeal of the female protagonist at the very instant when other means of expression appear to have been exhausted and when the erotic appeal of the siren threatens to overwhelm the narrator. Marie-Ange's immediate demand for reassurance that her song has given pleasure confirms the relationship between voice and sexual delight and the narrator's reply subsequently indicates the intensity of his response: 'Beaucoup, beaucoup de plaisir, Marie-Ange.'<sup>61</sup>

The same erotic resonance discernible in Le Braz' account of the siren song in *Le Sang de la sirène* is equally evident in the opera. When Naïc, is urged to sing at her own wedding, the moment is psychologically and dramatically charged. Her *ballade* signals a rite of passage, the approaching surrender of virginity and the transition from girlhood to womanhood, since, when the song ends, she must leave the island and sail to the lighthouse where the wedding night will be spent. It marks the precise moment at which her willing submission to patriarchal control is formally sought.

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<sup>59</sup> ['There was no doubt at all: the singer was Marie-Ange. I couldn't make her out amongst her (female) companions and yet I saw her. I saw her in the legendary past. She had become the spirit of the ocean once more, that inconstant and divine being, born of the dreams of primitive humanity in the distant, luminous sea. She advanced to the rhythm of the waves. Her blue-green eyes reflected the mysterious rocky depths where, at the dawn of time, the first seeds of life developed. Her hair, seemingly composed of living plants, sent forth an odour so strong that the whole world seemed to be enveloped by it. [...] She was one and many.']

<sup>60</sup> ['Everything about her was harmonious. Her whole body was pure song.']  
Le Braz (2001), p. 49.

<sup>61</sup> ['A great deal, a great deal of pleasure, Marie-Ange.']  
Ibid., p. 50.

Although the invitation to sing is, significantly, issued by the same young girls who have previously openly declared their wayward sexuality, the invitation is immediately countered by Yves who responds to the menace of feminine song by attempting to sabotage the performance with language which is allegorically primed with images of dominance, captivity and restraint.

YVES

Notre barque s'impatiente  
Et secoue violemment sa chaîne  
Déjà ma tour ouvre son œil de feu.  
[...] C'est notre feu, Naïc. Il nous attend. Partons !<sup>62</sup>

Moments of self-conscious performance in the on-stage world, of phenomenal song, are, however, particularly potent since they allow both audience and composer to sidestep their conventional roles and relationships. The interruption of any phenomenal song temporarily suspends the dramatic action, halts the main narrative thread and thereby renders the necessity of the 'willing suspension of disbelief' — which is, for opera audiences, strained to its utmost limits — redundant; the audience is effectively 'off-guard', so that narrative cues and subliminal social commentary can thus be efficiently transmitted. Equally, the 'interruptive' moment can sanction the composer's recourse to simpler folk-like structures which need not aspire either to full-blown aria status or to the aesthetic challenges of recitative. Naïc's *ballade*, which occurs in spite of Yves' attempts to suppress it, is, nonetheless, of increased significance and its decoding is vital to an understanding of the work as a whole.

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<sup>62</sup> ['Our boat is becoming impatient  
And is tugging violently on its chain.  
My tower has already opened its fiery eye.  
It's our fire Naïc. It's waiting for us. Let's go!']

Naïc's song nevertheless conforms to these general criteria; it interrupts the wedding and delays the departure of the main protagonists, it is based on a folk melody and it is psychologically charged. Its content is, in addition, reflexive, since it tells the story of a newly-wed bride who is seduced by a stranger in a gilded boat; the tragic ending of the *ballade*, the descent of the lovers into a black oceanic abyss, thus prefigures the fate of Naïc and Don Jacintho in the final act of the opera. Carolyn Abbate has drawn attention to the particular power of similar reflexive operatic moments:

Reflexive narrating within opera or theater has a certain vibrancy; the time it occupies hums — not least with the listener's mental movements between the small narrative performance and the events (the greater performance, as it were; the enacted drama) in which it has been set.<sup>63</sup>

In noting the tension that such moments provoke, Abbate distinguishes between the 'programmatic' reflexive song, which predicts future dramatic events at an early stage in a work, and the 'pivotal' song on which a drama might potentially hinge. Naïc's ballad is clearly programmatic; it occurs during the first act and functions in much the same way that an exposition functions in a sonata-principle structure: it represents an exposition of the tragedy in embryonic form and sets out the psychological themes which carry the potential to be developed in the course of the drama. By the point in the opening act when it is sung, the audience is already in possession of sufficient clues to decode its dramatic significance: a mysterious stranger has already appeared, the bride who sings the song is as uneasy as the character whose words she articulates and the dialogue-format of the number echoes the mood and sentiments of Naïc's previous encounter with Don Jacintho. The audience is thus primed so that when the final tragic *dénouement* of the actual drama arrives, it seems to forcefully recapitulate, confirm and amplify the narrative content of the bride's phenomenal

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<sup>63</sup> Abbate (1991), p. 67.

song. However, Naïc's parting song is equally pivotal because not only is this a phenomenal song, it is also a siren-song; the allegorical significance of the seductive, transgressive feminine voice consistently informs the work on multiple levels and whilst, superficially, it offers itself up for immediate decoding, the elusive qualities and dramatic implications of the song are equally far-reaching.

Abbate also notes the potency of the magical, fugitive 'unsung voices' which are present within music and transcend narrative because they relate to operatic moments which 'attempt something impossible: to represent music that, by the very terms of the fictions proposing it, remains beyond expression.'<sup>64</sup> She asserts that phenomenal song (she uses the Bell Song from *Lakmé* as an example) can exist as 'separate from the musical fabric surrounding it and that this creates a sound made by distance which, though unsung, is nevertheless heard.'<sup>65</sup> Lazzari signals this distance and the otherness of Naïc and of her ballad in the score by indicating that a Lithuanian, rather than a Breton folk song was its inspiration and by naming the specific collection from which the musical theme was borrowed (Example 8).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Carolyn Abbate, 'Preface', *In Search of Opera* (Princeton University Press, 2001), vii.

<sup>65</sup> Abbate (1991), p. 29.

<sup>66</sup> The collection cited is Heinrich Zoellner's *Lettische Volkslieder* (Leipzig: Kistner, 1895). Lazzari indicates that the borrowing has been sanctioned by Zoellner.



(Naïe entre dans le cercle de ses compagnes et, d'un air un peu égaré, passe sa main sur son front.)

(1) Modéré (♩ = 92)

NAÏC

Qu'es-tu ve - nu chercher dans notre hum - ble vil - la - ge?

Je suis ve - nu te deman - der en mar - i - a - ge.

(1) Le thème de cette Ballade est extrait du recueil "*Lettische Volkslieder*" de Heinrich Zoellner avec l'autorisation de l'Auteur

Example 8: Act I. 'Who is looking for me in our humble village?'  
'I have come to ask for your hand in marriage.' (VS, p. 83).

The enigmatic nature of the song is reinforced by the keys through which it passes; these shift according to its narrative voices but are not consistently aligned with either of the 'protagonists' in the story. The 'siren' key of E major is however predictably prominent in the folk-song passages but is nevertheless chromatically subverted to indicate social challenge or ambivalence. Thus the bride's initial rejection of the stranger's advances is confidently stated in E major (Example 9) but immediately

undermined by the half-diminished chord on the word ‘anneau’ as she questions the value of her wedding ring:

Na. *a Tempo*  
 Hé - las, il est trop tard... j'ai en - ga - gé mon cœur...

*mp*

Na. *dim. e rall.* il est trop tard, hé.las! *a Tempo, poco meno (♩ = 72)* Que m'importe l'anneau?

*dim. e rall.*

Example 9: Act I. ‘Alas, it’s too late; I’ve already given my heart.  
 It’s too late, alas!  
 What does the ring matter to me?’ (VS, p. 84).

E major and E minor, moreover, fluctuate as her lover describes the golden boat that will transport the couple to the ‘isles of dream’; however, the harmonic approach to the ‘isles’ (Example 10) projects the duality of the siren since A flat (extended) and A major chords are characteristically juxtaposed (bar 3, beats 3 and 4). The introduction of the celesta into the texture at end of the song, where the ghostly love song of the dead lovers is described, further serves to heighten the supernatural significance of the song.



Example 10: Act I. 'A golden boat is nearing the shore to take us to the islands of dreams.'  
(VS, p. 85).

The characters on stage react in disparate fashion to the elusive presence of the 'unsung voice' of the siren; the villagers respond with incomprehension, either declaring 'What a strange song!', or demanding 'Who taught you this strange song?' Naïc has no answer 'I don't know', she says 'the sea birds brought it to me'; Don Jacintho, however, is notably alert to the transcendent elements of the song and, as soon as the general expressions of incomprehension are complete, he attempts to seduce the singer. The fugitive qualities of the phenomenal performance are thus clearly signalled and the narrative content of the ballad proves to be less significant than the 'unsung' siren-song which it projects.

Lazzari nevertheless manipulates and extends the narrative material derived from the second libretto source. In *La Tour de feu*, the extended reflection on the siren song — the unsung voice of the eternal feminine destined to lure, suffer and mourn — is

replaced by a more insistent social comment. All attempts to silence the feminine voice in the opera allegorically thus represent the imposition of patriarchal control on the seductive feminine other; this menace can only be regulated by the suppression of the feminine singing voice and the isolation of the female protagonist in the lighthouse. Marriage is, moreover, presented as a social contract calculated to promote patriarchy but potentially detrimental to the feminine psyche; it initiates the loss of female song and of sensual delight; indeed, since it completely silences the feminine voice, it also implicitly demands the annihilation of creativity and the surrender of identity. Naïc significantly declares her fear of the lighthouse and her impulse to sing at the moment when she acknowledges the erotic feelings for Don Jacintho which challenge her platonic affection for the *gardien*. Immured within the confines of the lighthouse, she thus not only loosens her hair but also declares ‘Je veux chanter pour ne plus penser.’<sup>67</sup> The binary opposition of instinctive sexual desire and balanced rationality is allegorically explored by contrasting the impulse to sing with the suppression of song; moreover, the feminine singing voice is cast as intemperate and incalculably dangerous.

Naïc’s second phenomenal song, which occurs in the central act, is nonetheless brief. She barely manages to complete the first phrase ‘Un cygne noir vient de loin sur la mer’ (Example 12) before succumbing to the patriarchal social control mechanism with which she has been indoctrinated: ‘Je ne dois pas chanter’.<sup>68</sup> The fragment of song, however, is inevitably destined to recall Breton village life since Lazzari arguably borrows from La Villemarqué’s *Barsaz Breiz* scores by using the same pitch values as the first four notes of the tune ‘Le Cygne’ (Example 11) which is also

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<sup>67</sup> [‘I want to sing so that I don’t have to think.’]

<sup>68</sup> [‘A black swan comes from far across the sea. I must not sing.’]

associated with the tale of a 'swan' from over the seas.<sup>69</sup> Embedded in folklore and subliminally primed with communal values, Naïc's song is thus pre-programmed with the seeds of its own dissolution and although it momentarily signals the approach of the siren key of E major, the abrupt annihilation of that key and the institution of E flat minor (Example 12, bar 3) usher in an acute litany of mourning for absent song.

**ANN ALARC'H**  
LE CYGNE

*Tempo di marcia-*

Eunn a - larc'h, eunn a - larc'h tre

-mor, Eunn a - larc'h, eunn a - larc'h tre

mor, War lein tour moal kas- tel Ar - vor !

Dinn, dinn, daon! d'ann em gann d'ann em gann

Oh ! Dinn, dinn, daon! d'ann em gann a eann !

Example 11: 'Le Cygne'

<sup>69</sup> La Villemarqué (2003), pp. 267–71 and 549. Lazzari's other borrowings from this source are recorded in Chapter 4, pp. 224–31.

Naïc. **Modéré** (♩ = 44) **Animé**  
 Un cy-gne noir vient de loin sur la mer... Qu'est-ce que je fais?

Naïc.  
 Je ne dois pas chan - ter, plus ja - mais, plus ja -

Naïc.  
 - mais!

Example 12: Act II. 'A black swan came from afar across the sea.  
 I must not sing, ever again, ever again!'  
 (VS, p. 141).

Nevertheless, throughout the opera, the feminine singing voice constantly reasserts itself in spite of the controls which are deployed to contain it; each act thus contains intimations of siren-song and of its power. The overwhelming potency of the feminine voice is, moreover, confirmed by Naïc's third, final excursion into phenomenal song which occurs at the moment of dénouement. When Naïc realizes that Don Jacintho's vessel, the rescue-boat which will remove her from the



lighthouse, liberate her from her marriage and deliver her to her lover, is about to be decoyed onto the rocks and certain destruction by the vengeful *gardien*, her instinctive response is to sing. In extremis, and in spite of the ongoing storm, she thus declares her intention to sing a warning:

Ah! Chanter! Je veux chanter !  
Ah! Les récifs ... les récifs ....  
(Commençant à chanter.)

Bien aimé  
La mer est traîtresse  
Prends garde, ne viens pas ici,  
Pas ici.<sup>70</sup>

Yves' subsequent exhortation to silence: 'Ne chante pas! Cela porte malheur',<sup>71</sup> augments the steadily accruing tension which has been accorded to all the phenomenal expressions of feminine song in the opera. His terror, however, derives not merely from village folklore but also from the recognition of the menacing feminine other whose unstoppable song is indicative of transcendent power. The song marks Naïc's transition from a state of submissive compliance with patriarchal social conventions to active partnership in a freely-chosen sexual alliance with Don Jacintho. Lazzari, moreover, chose to reinforce the binary opposition of genders by directing that the final interchange between the protagonists should occur during a violent physical struggle and that the stage should be lit by intermittent lightning. At the precise moment when Naïc's song triumphantly asserts itself, her feminine singing voice is united with the sounds of the natural world, of thunder and of crashing waves, so that its atavistic significance is unambiguously declared; this

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<sup>70</sup> ['Ah! Sing! I want to sing!  
Ah! The rocks ... the rocks ....  
(She begins to sing.)

Beloved  
The sea is treacherous.']

<sup>71</sup> ['Don't sing! It brings bad luck.']

soundscape is equally the setting for the destruction of the shipwrecked sailors whose dying cries significantly accompany the transcendent feminine voice.

At the moment of *dénouement*, moreover, the distinctions between phenomenal song, the actual lyrical performance into which it has been inserted and the ‘unsung’ siren-song are blurred. Since the song itself is an improvised warning forced from Naïc in extremis, it is unclear which of her cries form part of the song she is driven to sing and which are screams of anguish as Don Jacintho drowns and her own death becomes imminent. This conflation, which finally eliminates the disjunction between the phenomenal song and ‘the continuum which embeds it’ thus directly asserts the allegorical significance of siren-song and of the ‘suspicious power of music’;<sup>72</sup> the moment is neither reflexive nor pivotal and the audience is well aware of the fatal paradox of this powerful, transcendent feminine voice which is capable of fatally singing itself and the performance into silence.

Yet, although the allegorical projection of the feminine voice as a siren-song is fundamental to an understanding of the opera, the demarcation between gender roles in *La Tour* is not always rigid. Don Jacintho, for example, manages to negotiate the schism between genders with ease. He communicates in a direct, terse manner with Yann in order to establish his cultural superiority; his brusque demands for immediate information and action are stereotypically masculine. Equally, he uses the sexual currency of Naïc’s appeal to establish his masculine, heterosexual credentials. Although he is angered by the delays to the repair of his boat and impatient for departure, he nonetheless responds to the pilot’s sly insinuations about the

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<sup>72</sup> Abbate (1991), p. 29.

incongruous marriage which has just been celebrated and is drawn into a voyeuristic assessment of the bride's beauty:

Un tel destin pour cette magnifique créature !  
Tant de beauté à la merci d'un homme  
Incapable de la comprendre !<sup>73</sup>

In his interactions with Naïc, however, his language is modified; the spare, staccato delivery of his earlier exchanges is replaced by prose which is laden with imagery and symbolism and which appeals directly to the imagination. Don Jacintho, indeed, in this respect, resembles the third member of the love triangle in Le Braz' *Le Gardien du feu*, Hervé Louarn, who establishes a rapport with the lighthouse keeper, Goulven, but is nonetheless able to seduce Adèle because he is of her own race and is therefore a consummate story teller with the same inclination towards fantasy:

[...] Il nous dévida tout un chapelet d'histoires, tantôt baroques, tantôt émouvantes, et toujours avec une telle verve que nous nous imaginions Adèle et moi, non les entendre, mais y assister.<sup>74</sup>

Yet the identity of the mysterious stranger from the sea in the libretto plot is ambivalent. When he first appears, he is taken for a Spaniard by Yann, but nevertheless subsequently declares that he is Portuguese. His specific national identity, however, is never narratively or dramatically confirmed and appears to be an attempt at obfuscation rather than clarification. Don Jacintho's arrival, then, introduces an element of the exotic which further builds on the supernatural overtones

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<sup>73</sup>['What a fate for such a magnificent creature!  
So much beauty at the mercy of a man  
Who is incapable of understanding it.']

<sup>74</sup> ['He recited a whole rosary of stories, sometimes bizarre, sometimes moving, and yet always with such skill that Adèle and I imagined that we weren't just listening to them but were actually talking part in them.']  
Le Braz (1929), p. 101.

and comments obliquely on the ways in which strangers are perceived in the island community.

Moreover, although the language which he deploys in his dialogues with Naïc initially seems to be merely the practiced banter of a skilled seducer whose charisma derives from his ability to promise and conjure the precise material and imaginative delights subliminally desired by the female protagonist, during the central act of the opera the commonality of the erring lovers' vocabulary becomes apparent. Since language is a prime marker of identity which confers spiritual and social cohesion, the linguistic similarities which connect Naïc and Don Jacintho demonstrate that they possess a common group identity. In addition, they both represent the opposing 'other' which inevitably confronts the stable existence of the Breton villagers and the *gardien*. Naïc thus dreams of her future in terms of a fairy-tale existence:

Il me semble que je suis une princesse de légende  
Qui, toute chargée de perles et de bijoux,  
Va regagner sa tour silencieuse.<sup>75</sup>

When the reality of life on the bleak rock where the lighthouse is situated becomes apparent and when her actual and allegorical voices are threatened, Naïc succumbs to Don Jacintho's charismatic appeal because his language not only responds to her inner fantasies but also seems to indicate that their origins are identical:

Je te griserais de musiques et de parfums,  
Je te vêtirai d'or, de soie et de velours.  
Je ferai ruisseler sur ton corps merveilleux  
Les émeraudes et les perles.  
Petite reine de la mer, qui règne sur les flots,  
Tu seras ma reine.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> ['It seems to me that I am a princess in a legend who, covered in pearls and jewels is going back to her silent tower.']

<sup>76</sup>['I will intoxicate you with music and perfumes,

However, so accurately does the sensuality of Don Jacintho's language echo Naïc's vague yearnings that it seems not only to transmit similar fairy-tale fantasies but also to allow the gender markers, with which language is frequently charged, to be blurred. The identity of the stranger from the sea is as obscure as that of the child found in the fishermen's nets and a degree of sexual ambivalence reinforces his mystique. Dethomas' sketch for the design of the mysterious sailor's costume seems, moreover, to transmit the equivocal nature of his character: the cloak shrugged seductively from the shoulder, the serpentine pose with one arm which draws attention to the curve of the hips and tight waistline whilst the other provocatively draws the cloak across the coyly concealed genital area, the oblique gaze and the curling tresses all hint at effeminacy as much as at concealment.<sup>77</sup> Dethomas was an accomplished artist as well as a theatre designer so that his decision to portray the third element of the romantic triangle as if destined for a *travesti* role must have been, at least in part, a direct response to the music, to the libretto or to the instructions of the composer.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, these visible attributes which convey feminine allure as much as stereotypical masculine bravado link Don Jacintho visually to Naïc, the female protagonist. Dethomas' costume sketch for Naïc (Figure 29) portrays her in an almost identical pose; her gaze fails to engage directly with the viewer and she thus eludes

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I will clothe you in gold, silks and velvets.  
 I will make emeralds and pearls  
 Gleam on your marvellous body.  
 Little queen of the sea who reigns over the waves,  
 You will be my queen.']

<sup>77</sup> Maxime-Pierre Dethomas (1867–1929), Costumes for *La Tour de Feu*, 1928, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris, D216 [84].

<sup>78</sup> Dethomas was a friend of Degas and Toulouse Lautrec. See 'A Friend of Toulouse Lautrec: Maxime Dethomas' (1998) at [www.musee-orsay.fr](http://www.musee-orsay.fr) (Accessed 12 December 2006).

identification. In contrast, Dethomas elected to present the Breton protagonists in the costume-design sketches in a straightforward, frontal stance which declares their ethnic identity and overt masculinity.

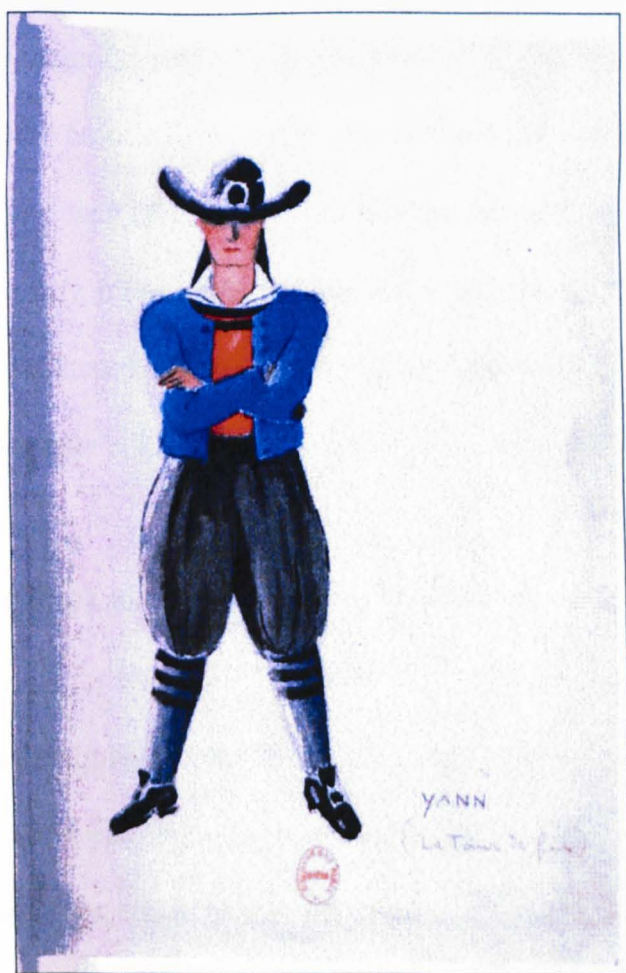


30: Costume design for Don Jacintho<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Dethomas (1928).





31: Costume design for Yann<sup>80</sup>

The degree of androgyny which is hinted at in the sketches and the ambivalence of the Don's language are equally transmitted musically by the manner in which the tessitura of the '*baryton élevé*', for which Don Jacintho's role is scored, is deployed. Since the tragic *gardien* and the schemer Yann are allotted the tenor and bass ranges respectively, the assignment of the baritone to the other male contender in the love triangle seems conventional enough. However, the vocal range is significantly and precisely deployed so that it allows for the masculine voice to stray towards the

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

feminine at crucial moments in Naïc's seduction.<sup>81</sup> Although Don Jacintho's interchanges with Yann exploit the lower baritone range, in interaction with Naïc, the highest extent of the range is more usually in evidence, so that his vocal range extends to precisely the point where Naïc's commences. The two identities thus merge and complement each other musically and linguistically: in transcending gender and sexuality they are presented as alpha and omega and, because they have both emerged from a distant land beyond the seas and have no clearly defined ethnic identity, their union seems to be both predestined and even vaguely incestuous.

### **Sailors, the Singing Rock and the Disappearing Chorus**

However, there is a protagonist in the opera who remains unaccounted for by either of the libretto sources and whose 'language' is equally ambivalent. A unique singing voice in the opera is absent from the cast list but nevertheless represents a formidable on-stage presence which is central to the dramatic action. La Chanteuse (The Singer), the singing rock, is a harbinger of menace; when the rock begins to 'sing' in the on-stage world, a storm is imminent, conditions at sea are perilous and the air is rife with intimations of morbidity and mortality. The rock is thus the sailor's nightmare and yet exerts an enduring, ambivalent fascination since, in spite of its apparent malevolence, it is a prominent maritime landmark which always succeeds in luring the fishermen and male protagonists to sea. Although no human voice gives it utterance during the course of the dramatic action, it is heard phenomenally within the on-stage world and its menace is significant for Yves and Yann:

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<sup>81</sup> ['High baritone'].

YANN

Je te retrouverai près de la Chanteuse.  
Ah ! Vous savez qu'elle a chanté ce matin ?

YVES, *troublé*,

Que dis-tu ? Elle a chanté ?

YANN

Oui, nous avons tous entendu flotter sur l'eau  
Son étrange chanson.  
Mais pourquoi annoncerait-elle un malheur ?  
La journée est si belle !<sup>82</sup>

More importantly, the rock is gendered as female and owes its existence to the rebellious, assertive feminine voice of a young wife who has unwittingly challenged the imposition of patriarchal control. Equally, its position in the seascape, its gender and its malice indicate that it sings a siren-song; it functions as an urgent reminder that Naïc, whose siren-identity and propensity for song are continually reasserted, is destined to return to her oceanic origins and that in so doing she will invite tragedy and wreak social havoc. Yann thus warns Don Jacintho of the maritime menace of the rock and simultaneously delineates the consequences, for the village girls, of ignoring the post-marital ban on feminine song:

YANN

Une jeune femme un jour l'oublia :  
Une lame de fond l'arracha au rivage.  
(*Il montre l'aiguille de rocher à droite.*)  
Elle est là maintenant, prisonnière des eaux,

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<sup>82</sup>['I will meet up with you by the Chanteuse.  
Ah! You know that she sang this morning?

What are you saying? She sang?

Yes we all heard her strange song floating above the water.  
But why would she be announcing a disaster?  
The day is so fine!']

Transformée en récif.  
Cette aiguille de roc s'appelle la Chanteuse,  
Elle porte malheur aux marins, la maudite !  
Quand on l'entend chanter, on est en grand danger.<sup>83</sup>

Yet the rock is not merely an omnipresent danger for the Breton sailors; since it is visible to the audience and incorporated into the stage design for Act I, it is both the actual backdrop for Naïc's first phenomenal song and a powerful trope for the tragic *impasse* of the psychomachic conflict between duty and desire which will prompt the destruction of the protagonists. The metaphorical significance of the rock is nonetheless layered and complex; it confronts both the audience and the on-stage protagonists with a visible manifestation of the significance of absent sound and of the consequences of denied sonority; it signals the dangerous power of music and its existence transmits the notion that seductive, arrested music will ultimately and menacingly evade the imposed petrified silence which attempts to stifle it. Far from being merely a picturesque element in the scenic design, the singing rock presents an inherent philosophical paradox within a genre which depends on vocal sonority; it prompts an interrogation of the tenuous relationship between sound and silence; in the midst of ongoing sound, it predicts its absence — the deprivation which the opera-goer will endure when the performance ends. Yet, like Naïc's phenomenal song, it equally suggests the presence of music which remains beyond direct

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<sup>83</sup>['One day a young wife forgot it (the rule forbidding post-marital song).  
A wave from the depths swept her from shore.  
(*He points to the column of rock on the right.*)  
She is still there, a prisoner of the waves,  
Transformed into a reef.  
The needle-shaped rock is called 'the singer',  
It brings bad luck to sailors, the damned thing!  
If you hear it sing, you're in great danger.']

audience-accessibility and which can 'signify in ways that pass beyond the tale told.'<sup>84</sup>

Since the fugitive music, in this case, has been arrested as petrified siren-song, the extremity of the contrast between actual and implied sonorities and the significance of the metaphor which fuels the comparison are at their most intense. Moreover, the links between the provenance of the rock and Naïc's increasingly desperate need to sing reinforce the association between the power of music and the transgressive feminine voice. La Chanteuse is a visible reminder that, in spite of Naïc's exotic, supernatural otherness, it is her gender which issues the major challenge to the stability of the patriarchal society in which she operates; that inherent, insistent tendency to provoke sociological and emotional crisis is made manifest in her impulse to sing.

The rock nevertheless confronts audience and protagonists with a concrete and visible reminder of the multiple meanings of voice and voice object within the operatic genre. Michel Poizat, in his extended analysis of *jouissance*, the ecstatic gratification which is afforded to the opera-goer, but which is 'distinct from mere pleasure', and of the sometimes fearful tensions between sound, words and silence which provoke and promote the experience of that extreme musical rapture, asserts that opera is akin to 'the angel's cry' and glorifies the pure vocal utterance which transcends conventional narrative. Yet whilst the angel is perceived as the intermediary between the human and the divine, Poizat also acknowledges that the feminine voice plays a distinct role in promoting the overwhelming power of vocal music: 'Operatic romanticism

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<sup>84</sup> Abbate (1996), p. 9.

establishes Woman as the last avatar of the Angel, makes her the privileged ground of the quest for the vocal object.<sup>85</sup> More significantly, Poizat's discourse recognizes the danger which ensues from that quest, from the mapping of fantasies onto the voice object and from the abandonment to *jouissance* which, in *La Tour* is manifest in the personified stone, the petrified woman embodied by La Chanteuse:

Elusive and inaccessible, evanescent or non-existent, the cause of desire, the locus of lack, and the nullification of lack, locus of *jouissance* both infinite and impossible, alluring and forbidden, death-ridden and deadly, trans-sensical and trans-sexual, heavenly voice or hellish cry, angel or demon, The Voice and The Woman come together in these tightly woven fantasies; they fuse, completely justifying Wagner's aphorism that music is a woman. For only the alchemy of music allows the voice to be purged of the meaning it usually conveys.<sup>86</sup>

La Chanteuse, whose voice is audible to all social groups and genders in the dramatic narrative, is, then, both an allegorical demonstration and a phenomenal on-stage expression of the primal cry of rapture and the constructs which attempt to account for it; it represents the arrested moment of overwhelming *jouissance* which is so seductive and dangerous that it must be literally and instantly contained as petrified silence; its silence however, is ambivalent. Catherine Clément notes that the opera repertory organizes gender and sexuality in such a way that '[...] on the opera stage women perpetually sing their eternal undoing. The emotion is never more poignant than at the moment when the voice is lifted to die.'<sup>87</sup> The singing rock nevertheless confronts the suggestion that opera is the 'undoing of women' and presents the antithetical notion that at the precise moment when the feminine voice is extinguished, it becomes a locus of transcendent power.

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<sup>85</sup> Poizat, (1993), p. 132.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>87</sup> Catherine Clément, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 5.



The rock is therefore directly implicated in the tragic *dénouement*. It conceals Don Jacintho's lurking boat which will take Naïc from the lighthouse as soon as she gives the all clear signal. Its *singing* voice has been heard and this not only precipitates Yves into launching the rescue boat and leaving Naïc in the lighthouse but also accounts for the treacherous sailing conditions which assist Yves in luring Jacintho's ship onto the reef when he discovers Naïc's betrayal. It is the hazard on which the ship ultimately founders. Its voice is 'unsung' and yet singing; more significantly, since it is an essential component of the tempest, in the final moments of the opera it arguably becomes audible to the audience and combines with Naïc's final song in blurring the noumenal and phenomenal worlds which the work has created.

Yet if the symbolism of the open seascape and the introduction of a petrified and petrifying female voice allowed Lazzari to explore the scope and challenge of the siren-songs of the eternal feminine, his insistence on claustrophobic interior space in the final act also reveals changes within the operatic genre and within society itself. The entire dramatic action of the opera is, indeed, a progression from open to closed space: the first act takes place outside in the open space of the fishing village in front of the inn and the church; the setting for the second act is the rock at the foot of the lighthouse (Figure 27) and the dramatic action of the third act oscillates between the two uppermost rooms of the lighthouse (Figure 32). Equally, the shifting linear perspective of the designs for each of the three acts emphasizes the hypnotic power of the lighthouse tower; whilst the distant tower is sited precisely at the vanishing point which defines the perspective of the décor for the first tableau, by the second act, the vanishing point on the horizon line leads the eye through the lighthouse door; ultimately, the perspective of the final design is defined by a vanishing point in the

interior space of the lighthouse, immediately between the living chamber and the lamp room from which the fatal conflagration will begin. The pictorial organization of on-stage space thus ensures that the audience is inexorably drawn to the heart of the edifice which symbolically represents controlling patriarchal cultural hegemony.

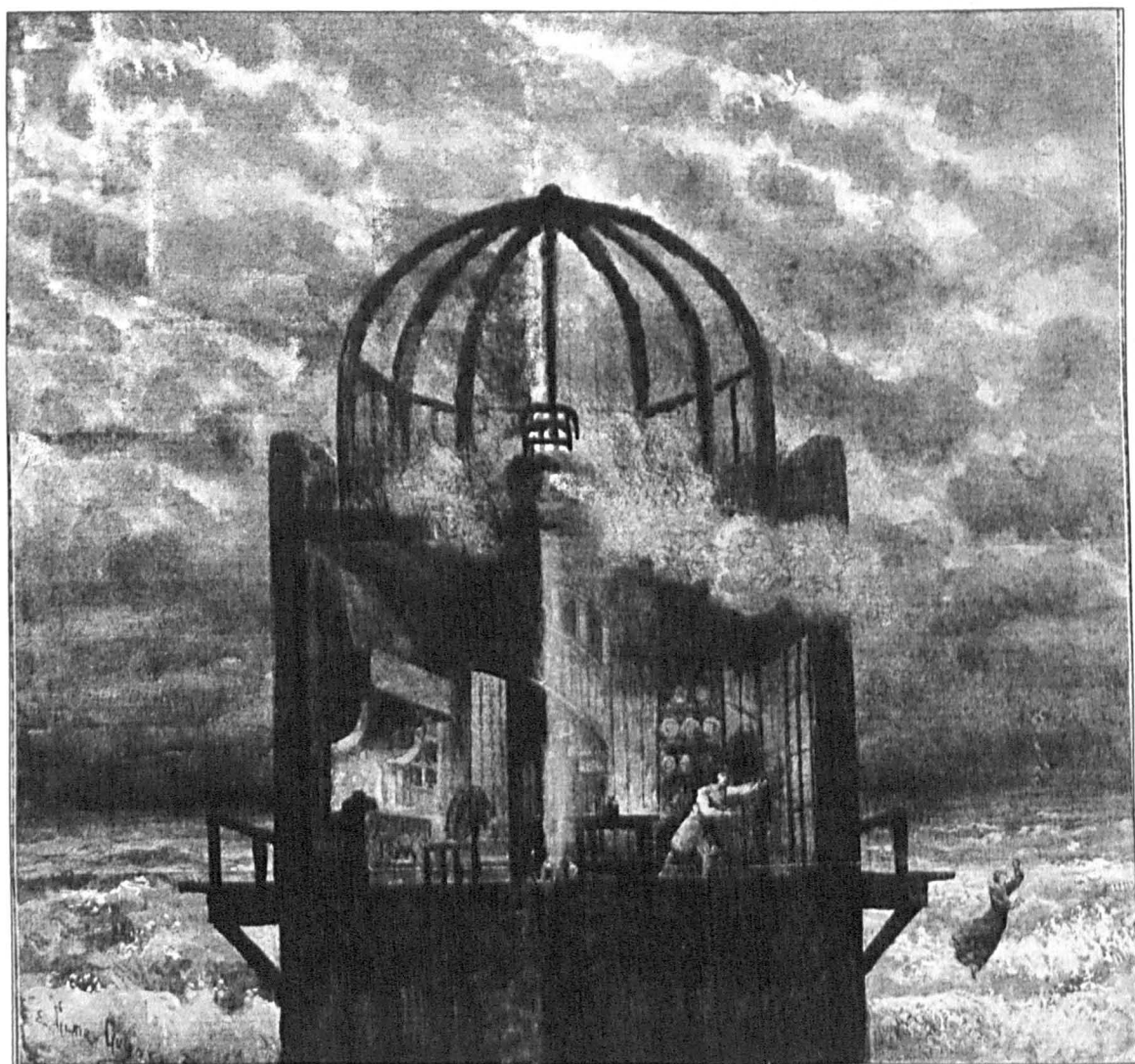
Anselm Gerhard has noted that operas from the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrated a 'longing for interior space' and a 'wholesale withdrawal from Meyerbeerian historical tragedy into the interior world of private, personal tragedies'.<sup>88</sup> Although contrasting, highly pictorial stage settings had always promoted the transition from open to closed space and from public celebration or demonstration to private dramatic events, in *La Tour de feu*, an opera from the first quarter of the succeeding century, the degree of withdrawal from open space has become acute and is visually as well as symbolically manifest in the restricted space of the lighthouse. Lacombe's suggestion that, in relation to nineteenth-century opera, 'From exposition to dénouement, the drama unfolds in accordance with a rhetoric of décor' is equally apposite when applied to Lazzari's final Breton opera; nevertheless, in *La Tour*, the process of opening or closing theatrical space is not variable, nor is it a mere technical device which allows for successive interludes of heightened or relaxed dramatic tension; once the process of retreat towards oppressively restricted space has been initiated, it is relentlessly maintained.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, the dramatic tension promoted by the depiction of the claustrophobic containment of the protagonists is reinforced by the fact that the drama requires no drastic temporal foreshortening; the action takes place during the course of little more than a single day and this allows the final act to unfold at night and to be shrouded in relative

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<sup>88</sup> Gerhard (1998), p. 441.

<sup>89</sup> Lacombe (2001), p. 90.

darkness, thus heightening the reduction of space by increasing the areas of shadow. More significantly, through the juxtaposition of the enclosed lighthouse with the surrounding ocean, the scenic rhetoric reinforces the sense of a stark elemental struggle, not only between the two individual protagonists but between the genders they represent, between nature and artifice, between land and sea and between the finite and the infinite.



32: Décor for Act III of *La Tour de feu*<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The sketch of Dethomas' décor for the final act appeared in *L'Illustration*, 21 January 1928.

The gradual restriction of space is, moreover, mirrored by a progressive reduction of the vocal contribution and visual spectacle of the chorus: the entire cast and chorus are on stage in the first act; in the second act, whilst the protagonists are all present at various times, the (offstage) male chorus of fishermen is only heard briefly in the distance. Throughout the final act, the tragic confrontation of Naïc and Yves dominates the dramatic action, and the distant cries of the drowning sailors and Don Jacintho are heard only at the height of the tempest and as the *dénouement* approaches. Although this strategy may have been Lazzari's deliberate response to the performing forces at his disposal — inaccurate intonation, irregular attack and poor acting in the chorus numbers were noted at the time of the opera's premiere<sup>91</sup> — he nevertheless elected to open the opera with a scene of rejoicing which followed established conventions in its deployment of the chorus. The choral voices in the first act, then, are those of the wedding guests whose festive songs and activities contribute to a sense of spectacle so that, in spite of comparatively modest numbers,<sup>92</sup> the manner of their deployment seems to echo those erstwhile compositional practices which had ensured that, as James Parakilas suggests, 'The chorus puts the "grand" into grand opera.'<sup>93</sup>

Yet, whilst the functions of the chorus had always been multiple and highly nuanced, in operas which make serious use of *couleur locale* or which explore regional identities, the *vox populi* which the chorus embodies is particularly significant. Catherine Clément recognizes that the chorus, the 'society of voices', represents 'a people — a community — but also tribes and bodies, each with its own role in that

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<sup>91</sup> *Le Ménestrel*, 20 January 1928, p. 24.

<sup>92</sup> Photographs of the first performance suggest that the female chorus consisted of sixteen members.

<sup>93</sup> James Parakilas, 'The Chorus' in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, David Charlton, ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 76.

opera's version of history'.<sup>94</sup> Benedict Anderson, however, famously defined the nation as an 'imagined community'; since his definition applies equally to ethnic nations and regional identities, the act of imagining such a community depicted within a cultural artefact, such as an opera, is doubly charged. A coherent simultaneity of imagining is required; the onstage community must be demonstrably capable of imagining its own limits and the timescale that is relevant to its tribal identity and actions; it must equally transmit this sense of identity so that:

The casual progression [...] from the 'interior' time [of the artefact] to the 'exterior' time of the [consumer's] everyday life gives a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community.<sup>95</sup>

The chorus of *invités* therefore bears the burden of creating the Breton community in such a way that it provides not only the credible social context for the interior private tragedy which will engulf the protagonists, but also of transmitting the imagined, limited community to audiences so that the values of the tribe can function as the yardstick by which dramatic events will be assessed and ultimately approved or deplored. 'Regional' operas, such as *La Tour*, which aimed at more than transient entertainment, and which were performed in the capital and in venues proclaiming the legitimizing identities of central cultural hegemony, clearly needed to define the distant and rural imagined community with sustained precision. When, as here, the tragedy is compounded by the context of the social isolation of both community and individual protagonists, this need is heightened.

As the opera begins, then, the wedding guests immediately assert the group identity:

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<sup>94</sup> Catherine Clément in Mary Ann Smart, ed. (2000), p. 21.

<sup>95</sup> Anderson (1983), pp. 6 and 27.

Nous vous portons des fleurs,  
Fleurs de notre village, [...]   
Fleurs d'ajonc et de houx  
En l'honneur des époux.<sup>96</sup>

The community is identified as 'our village' and the designated flowers accurately refer to Breton coastal flora; the stage directions, moreover, call for 'une légende populaire'<sup>97</sup> and the modal (G mixolydian) musical setting, whilst not a direct borrowing, strongly recalls several of the folk songs appended at the end of La Villemarqué's *Barzaz Breiz*, the core libretto source for two other works in this study.<sup>98</sup> The second strophe, in addition refers to the religious rites which bind the folk of the village so that the entire opening number for the chorus immediately flags up the geographical and moral confines of the community, the limits of which are vital for imagining its 'deep, horizontal comradeship'.<sup>99</sup>

Nous avons ce matin  
Fait brûler plus d'un cierge  
A Monsieur Saint-Martin  
Et Madame la Vierge.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> ['We bring you flowers,  
Flowers from our village.  
Gorse blossom and holly  
In honour of the newly-weds.']

<sup>97</sup> ['A popular song.']

<sup>98</sup> Lazzari had drawn directly on this collection for musical themes for *La Lépreuse*.

<sup>99</sup> Anderson (1983), p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> ['We have, this morning  
Lit more than one candle  
To Saint Martin  
And the Virgin Mary.']



*(On voit sortir furtivement de la tonnelle le pilote Yann. Il fait quelques pas sur la*

**CHŒUR**

**SOPR. (Quelques uns)**  
 Nous vous portons ces fleurs, — Fleurs de no - tre vil - la - ge, A -

**CONTR.**  
 Nous vous portons ces fleurs, Fleurs de no - tre vil - la - ge, A -

**TÉN.**  
 Nous vous portons ces fleurs, — Fleurs de no - tre vil - la - ge, A -

**BAS.**  
 Nous vous portons ces fleurs, Ces fleurs de no - tre vil - la - ge, A -

**Un peu plus animé (♩ = 69)**

*place et revient malgré lui vers l'auberge pour observer les dîneurs derrière le rideau de feuillage. Sa physionomie est*

**S.**  
 - vec tous nos meil - leurs Vœux d'heureux ma - ri - a - ge, Fleurs d'ajonc et de houx

**C.**  
 - vec tous nos meil - leurs Vœux d'heureux ma - ri - a - ge, Fleurs d'ajonc et de houx

**T.**  
 - vec tous nos meil - leurs Vœux d'heureux ma - ri - a - ge, Fleurs d'ajonc et de houx

**B.**  
 - vec tous nos meil - leurs Vœux d'heureux ma - ri - a - ge, Fleurs d'ajonc et de houx

Example 13: Act I. 'We bring you these flowers, flowers from our village.' (VS, p. 4).

The firm affirmation of the limits of the 'imagined community' is, moreover, reinforced throughout the first act by Lazzari's consistent recourse to folk-like melodies; the entire wedding ritual is underpinned by music which relies on archaic

modalities and which asserts rural identities, The tribal voice is nonetheless challenged at the outset since the asides of the concealed and jealous nautical pilot, Yann, who always operates on the periphery of the village community, interrupt each strophe. His tonally unstable interjections, which rail against Naïc's marriage and which culminate in his determination to destroy the union, do not derail the celebrations; however, each of the choral verses, whilst retaining the myxolidian quality of the first statement, is repeated at a different pitch. Moreover, (Example 14, bar 4) the half-diminished chords which reflect the anguish which will give rise to Yann's menace immediately subvert the ensuing choral statement of rejoicing; the latter deploys an A flat mixolydian mode in contrast to the first choral entry on G. A private, personal tragedy, then, initiates a subtle but disquieting intrusion into the expression of socially-cohesive celebration.

Ya. Leur bon - heur me dé - chi re le

**CHŒUR.**

**SOPR. (Quelques uns)**  
Nous a - vons ce ma - tin Fait brû - ler plus d'un

**CONTR.**  
Nous a - vons ce ma - tin Fait brû - ler plus d'un

**TÉN.**  
Nous a - vons ce ma - tin Fait brû - ler plus d'un

**BAS.**  
Nous a - vons ce ma - tin Fait brû - ler plus d'un

10

**S.**  
cier - ge A Mon - sieur Saint Mar - tin Et Ma - da - me la Vier - ge,

**G.**  
cier - ge A Mon - sieur Saint Mar - tin Et Ma - da - me la Vier - ge,

**T.**  
cier - ge A Mon - sieur Saint Mar - tin Et Ma - da - me la Vier - ge,

**B.**  
cier - ge A Mon - sieur Saint Mar - tin Et Ma - da - me la Vier - ge,

Example 14: Act I. 'Their happiness tears my heart apart.' (VS, p. 6).

In the central act, however, the link between the progression towards private, interior space and the elimination of the chorus becomes more evident as Yves's retreat into interior emotional disintegration is aligned with the jettison of the ties that bind him to the 'imagined community'. The curtain rises to reveal Yves alone in front of the lighthouse; his soliloquy (Example 15) is, tellingly, a celebration of solitude which forms a unique contrast with the monologue in the central act of Ropartz' *Le Pays*. Whereas the male protagonist, Tual, in the earlier opera, opens the second act with a lament for the loss of his Breton homeland and community, Yves is magnetically drawn to the isolation that will ensure his downfall.

YVES

Tout est i - ci so - li - tude et si -

sempre *pp*

Yv.

len - ce... Quel calme au - tour de nous quand la

Yv.

mer se tait...

M.G.

Example 15: Act II. 'All around me is solitude and silence.' (VS, p. 103).

His lonely soliloquy is interrupted by the distant song of the fishermen, a phenomenal interlude for the male chorus which partially balances the contribution, in the first act, of its feminine counterpart and which emphasizes the strict polarization of the genders within the village community. The *a cappella* chorus (Example 16), in compound duple time, mimics the rocking of the boat and conveys the uncomplicated professional identity of the fishermen in a conventional barcarolle. It transmits notions of masculine comradeship, toil, physical endeavour and shared danger:

Le vent est joyeux, la voile se gonfle,  
Le canot ailé fuit comme un oiseau.  
Chantez compagnons, chantez pour les vagues,  
Chantez pour le vent et pour le soleil.<sup>101</sup>

The song of the fishermen cadences unequivocally in B major, in contrast to the flat keys deployed in the soliloquy. However, Yves, in attempting to reiterate the melody, barely manages to shift falteringly to the sharp side for his fleeting expression of masculine commonality; his statement of the first line of the refrain is in G major, perhaps signifying his increasing social isolation since he fails to attain the bright key of the fishermen's statement. Although Yves belongs by gender and occupation to the group of fishermen, his marriage to Naïc has so destabilized his professional, ethnic and gender identities that his fractured self is musically as well narratively projected. Thus the extent of his separation from the village community is evident in his failure to reach a final perfect cadence in G major since he manages to sing the antecedent phrase of the refrain but fails to complete the chorus by achieving its consequent (Example 17); before he can progress to the anticipated full close, an augmented sixth chord on E flat (bar 7) intervenes as his thoughts turn to Naïc's excuses for delaying the consummation of their wedding.

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<sup>101</sup> ['The wind is joyful, the sail is swelling,  
The winged boat flies like a bird,  
Sing comrades, sing for the waves,  
Sing for the wind and for the sun.']



(tout à coup on entend, venant de loin les pêcheurs qui chantent. Vers a un mouvement d'impatience)

Rall.

Yv.

cheurs qui me ré-veil-le de mon rê-ve...

1<sup>er</sup> TÉN.

Le

2<sup>es</sup> TÉN.

Le

1<sup>er</sup> BASS.

Le

2<sup>es</sup> BASS.

Le

Rall.

CHŒUR des Pêcheurs (au loin)

Modérément animé (♩ = 56)

T.

vent est joy-eux, la voi-le se gon-fle, Le ca-not ai-lé fuit

vent est joy-eux, la voi-le se gon-fle, Le ca-not ai-lé fuit

B.

vent est joy-eux, la voi-le se gon-fle, Le ca-not ai-lé fuit

vent est joy-eux, la voi-le se gon-fle, Le ca-not ai-lé fuit

Modérément animé (♩ = 56)

T. comme un oiseau, Chan - tez, com - pagnons, chan - tez pour les va-gues, Chan -

S. comme un oiseau, Chan - tez, com - pagnons, chan - tez pour les va-gues, Chan -

A. comme un oiseau, Chan - tez, com - pagnons, chan - tez pour les va-gues, Chan -

B. comme un oiseau, Chan - tez, com - pagnons, chan - tez pour les va-gues, Chan -

Poco rall.

T. - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil, Chan - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil! Ha -

S. - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil, Chan - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil!

A. - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil, Chan - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil!

B. - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil, Chan - tez pour le vent et pour le so.leil!

Example 16: Act II. The Fishermen's Chorus (VS, p. 107).

*(tout en continuant à travailler, Yves fredonne doucement)*

YVES

Cédez Chan - tez, com - pagnons, chan - tez pour les va-gues, chan -

a Tempo

*pp*

5 *(Il s'interrompt et regarde le haut de la tour)* a Tempo, poco

Yv. - tez pour le vent et pour le soleil... Elle doit dor -

Rall. a Tempo, poco

Example 17: Act II. 'Sing, comrades/She must be sleeping.' (VS, p. 110)

At the point in the opera when the last fragment of the barcarolle fades, the 'imagined community' retreats into oblivion as the fishermen, who are its last representatives, sail off into the distance.<sup>102</sup> The dismissal of the chorus, in the central act, to diegetic space — they are heard but remain invisible to the audience — and the subsequent abrupt removal of its mediating influence in the establishment of a framework of normalizing, communal values, social roles and gender relationships allows the process of compulsive or coercive retreat towards interior space to accelerate. It foreshadows the final vertiginous, kaleidoscopic progress to the heart of the lighthouse where claustrophobic confinement will intensify the imposition of patriarchal control and provoke the final tragedy. In addition, in the final act, the drowning cries of Don Jacintho and his crew, who are not part of the village community, but who, nevertheless, represent the last remnants of an identifiable

<sup>102</sup> There is an additional statement of the refrain by the fishermen.

social group, seem to function as the harbingers, from diegetic space, of an approaching irreversible social disintegration which transcends the personal tragedy of the *gardien*.

The focus on the interior space of the lighthouse, which is achieved not merely by the narrative of the libretto, but also by 'the rhetoric of décor' and by the relegation of the chorus to diegetic margins, nevertheless provides Lazzari with the opportunity to probe the violent passions which arise in small communities, within limited space and in the context of brute toil and precarious existence. Although Manfred Kelkel rejects *La Tour* as a candidate for his study of *naturaliste* and *vériste* operas between 1890 and 1930 on the grounds that its historical setting renders it inadmissible,<sup>103</sup> the opera, nevertheless fulfils many of the generally accepted criteria for a *vériste* work: it exhibits 'a deep interest in the lower social strata', 'characteristic regionalism' and even, arguably, a 'true-to-life approach in dealing with contemporary reality'.<sup>104</sup> In spite of the picturesque costumes, it seems clear that the composer's choice of a seventeenth-century setting was a necessary dramaturgical device which allowed for a wooden, rather than a stone lighthouse to be the central edifice and which thus facilitated the spectacle of the final conflagration; both the libretto sources, moreover, are contemporary tales which explore the harsh realities of Breton life and economic survival.

Thus, whilst the *gardien* and the pilot in the opera are isolated individuals who function against the backdrop of a tempestuous seascape, they are not archetypal Romantic heroes. They do not seek communion with nature as a refuge from

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<sup>103</sup> Manfred Kelkel, *Naturalisme, vérisme et réalisme dans l'opéra de 1890 à 1930* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J Vrin, 1984), p. 45.

<sup>104</sup> Matteo Sansone, 'Verismo', *Grove Music Online* (Accessed 14 November 2007).

mundane existence; rather, raw nature, represented by the coastal landscape and the ocean, is their common workplace. Within the interior space of the lighthouse, the personal drama which is played out — the psychological disintegration of the *gardien* as a result of sexual jealousy — is consistent with post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory and with the re-evaluation, in the wake of the First World War, of masculine psychopathology in the face of unremitting relentless danger.<sup>105</sup> Elaine Showalter records the shift from the perception, at the *fin de siècle*, of hysteria as a predominantly ‘female malady’ to the recognition of its prevalence in the male population at the time of the Great War and notes that not only was this the era when psychiatric research drifted from London to Vienna and Paris but also that ‘Not Feminism but shell shock initiated the era of psychiatric modernism.’<sup>106</sup> Yves is not merely an exemplar, then, of social alienation; all of his utterances, apart from endearments directed at Naïc, are concerned with constant compulsive assessments of maritime danger, assertions of duty to other seafarers or preparations to commit himself to the menacing ocean in pursuit of that duty or the quest for food. When his breakdown occurs, tellingly it is preceded by an evasion of his obligation to put to sea in search of shipwrecked sailors:

YVES

Je serais fou de me risquer dans cette tempête  
Et de passer dans ma barque  
Cette nuit qui est notre nuit de noces.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Paul Voivenel, the French neurologist who served as an army doctor in the First World War and author of *La Psychose du soldat* (1918) was the first person to identify ‘la peur morbide acquise par hémorragie de la sensibilité’ (morbid terror consequent upon the erosion of sensitivity) or what we now refer to as ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’.

<sup>106</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (London: Virago, 2001), p. 164.

<sup>107</sup> [‘I would have to be mad to risk spending this night, our wedding night, in my boat in this storm.’]

Ultimately, Yves' personal crisis culminates in a total dereliction of duty; he deliberately extinguishes the lighthouse flame and ensures not only the death of the other erring constituents of the love triangle but also of Don Jacintho's crew and any other mariners in the vicinity of La Chanteuse. The abandonment of duty is, moreover, presented as the violation of a sacred oath:

NAIC

Eh bien, rallume le feu,  
Ne perds pas un instant.  
Tu as fait le serment sacré  
De veiller sur la flamme.<sup>108</sup>

YVES

Un serment, c'est bien peu de chose.<sup>109</sup>

This divergence from the plot of the original, pre-war novella, in which the *gardien's* rigid adherence to duty is maintained and where the tragedy is limited to the adulterous transgressors, seems to indicate that Yves' emotional deterioration can be perceived allegorically: viewed in the contemporary social context of the post-Great War period, it is an apposite depiction of stress disorder, psychological dysfunction and fugue.

Equally, those elements of the narrative which seem to belie its realism — the superstitious or supernatural facets of the drama — can, in part, be perceived in the light of the significance of folklore for isolated rural communities. Eugen Weber, in considering French politics, culture and myth from the mid-nineteenth to mid-

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<sup>108</sup> ['So, rekindle the flame.  
Don't lose a second.  
You swore a sacred oath  
To watch over the beacon.']

<sup>109</sup>['An oath is a small matter']



twentieth centuries, has noted that: 'the popular stories that we describe as fairy tales can tell us a great deal about real conditions in the world of those who told and those who heard the tales.'<sup>110</sup> He further identifies both the realities that underpinned common themes in folk-tales and the necessary catharsis which they provided for the daily miseries of rural life; amongst these themes, Weber also acknowledges the frequent recurrence of the notion that communities needed to be defended, even by recourse to magic, from the menace represented by sinister or duplicitous strangers and suitors.<sup>111</sup> The narrative thread which designates Naïc as a siren and Don Jacintho as a similar exotic intrusion into traditional communal life thus functions as an accurate, realistic reading of peasant unease at the destabilizing presence of the 'other' within village society.

In the final two acts, at least, *La Tour*, as Lazzari's earlier work *La Lépreuse* had also done, commented on contemporary social and cultural issues by presenting them in a comfortably distant, historical context. In its commentary on the loosening of communal ties, the valorization of private over public space and the emphasis on the self at the expense of social cohesion it aptly reflected the age in which the rate of peasant politicization was rapidly accelerating and in which 'Patchily but portentously, growing prosperity was beginning to emancipate rural populations from traditional dependencies and absorptions'.<sup>112</sup> The disappearing chorus was as much a trope for the new relationship between the regions and central cultural hegemony and the weakening of local ties as the tragedy within the lighthouse allegorically explored new challenges to patriarchy and shifting gender roles. For the audiences and critics

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<sup>110</sup> Weber (1991), p. 77.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

who were exposed to this twentieth-century expression of regionalism, however, the work was challenging.

In an ironic twist of fate, the year after Lazzari completed the score and three years before the first performance of *La Tour de Feu*, the actual lighthouse on the Pointe du Raz was in the news again. The two gardiens, the Corsicans Mandoloni and Terraci, were stranded on the rock of La Vieille from the middle of December until the end of February whilst prolonged storms prevented the relief of their turn of duty or the delivery of life-saving provisions. The light was extinguished completely on 19 January; thereafter, a brief flash of lightning revealed the desperate plight of the keepers. Rescue was only effected through the conspicuous bravery of the relief-boat crew and the Corsicans were close to death when they were finally removed from the rock. Whilst the event itself and the subsequent legal amendments to the conditions of reserved work in lighthouses were publicity of a sort for the opera, the near-tragedy was an apposite reminder that folk-lore and legends which deal with sirens, with men who are eternally lured to sea and with beckoning, mellifluous rocks, transmitted eternal truths about the hardships of Breton life.<sup>113</sup>

In this 'cinematic' opera, however, multiple disjunctions bear witness to the ambitious project which Lazzari had undertaken. The harsh realities of Breton coastal existence which derive from the narrative of the first libretto source are confronted with the mysticism of the siren-songs which transcend the perpetual cycle of Breton mourning in the second libretto source. Elements which recall grand opera or, in contrast, appear to veer towards *vérisme* are juxtaposed and the composer's musical

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<sup>113</sup> The lighthouse was manned until 1995.

language freely and consistently combines archaic, modal folk-tunes with more modern chromaticisms. In *La Tour de feu* the boundaries between noumenal and phenomenal voices are as inconstant and shifting as the folkloric *ondines* who rise from and disappear into the ocean; moreover, the rocky places, the lighthouse and the singing rock, which metaphorically project binary gender-opposition, are equally and intransigently menacing. Nevertheless, the work marked another significant stage in the development of *couleur locale*; it demonstrated conclusively that Breton opera was not merely a *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon but that, in using specific regional markers to focus on the social angsts of the new century, it continued to evolve.

## Resurrection and Reinvention

Il ne s'agit donc pas ici d'un intérêt purement local, mais bien d'un intérêt français ; car l'histoire de la Bretagne a toujours été mêlée à celle de la France, et la France est aussi celtique par le cœur que l'Armorique est française aujourd'hui sous le drapeau commun.<sup>1</sup>

The four Breton operas which have been evaluated here, far from being mere examples of deftly deployed *couleur locale*, eloquently bear testimony to the assertion in Jann Pasler's recent study that French music during the Third Republic constituted an enduring and valued 'public utility' which was capable of conferring, though multiple uses and meanings, 'a conception of history that includes [the individual] in the present' but which could equally convey 'a notion of civilization — of [shared] values, traditions and citizenship.'<sup>2</sup> A review of the case studies in the light of the issues which were raised in the opening chapter of this study indicates that the authentic or adopted regional identities of individual composers account for subtle differences in the ways in which these Breton operas functioned; nevertheless, their commonalities remain striking. In the evocation of traditional landscapes, the presentation of the region as an exotic yet familiar other and the progressive exploration of contemporary issues, they contributed to 'public utility' because they 'addressed the collective interests of the French people' and helped 'create the nation.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ['It is not a matter of purely local interest, but rather of French interest; for Brittany's history has always been intertwined with that of France, and France is just as Celtic at heart as Armorica (Brittany) is French beneath the common flag.']

La Villemarqué, 'Préambule' (2003), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (University of California Press, 2009), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

Against the political backdrop of the Third Republic, the era when centralized power promoted a concerted effort to turn peasants into Frenchmen, the operas were thus complicit in the renewed valorisation or invention of regional traditions which were implicated in the establishment of the sense of shared past essential for the imagined community of the evolving nation state. The literary sources of their libretti were variously based on fiction, semi-fiction or even alleged forgery;<sup>4</sup> yet what mattered was not the veracity of the source but its potential for conjuring an attractive past in which the public would consent to believe.

That the operas were ‘written to Paris’<sup>5</sup> with the tastes of the capital in mind and can potentially be considered as politicized art can thus be detected in the extent to which they refracted history through a nostalgic lens and allowed for the reshaping of national collective memory. In 1875, the year which saw the introduction of the constitutional laws of the third republic, Lalo began the first draft of *Le Roi d’Ys*, a work that provided a vision of the past which conformed to the Parisian fashion for regional *couleur médiévale* but which, more significantly, referred to an honourable, ancient, Celtic shared history in which good governance would always prevail, the populace was pliable and ‘les croyants’ were always ‘les forts’.<sup>6</sup> This simplistic and reductionary epithet, which forms part of the Act II, Scene 2 chorus for ‘the people’ not only proclaims the legitimizing values of central hegemony but conjures the essential vision of an idealized past.

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<sup>4</sup> The controversy concerning the authenticity of the *Barsaz Breiz* is discussed in Chapter 1, p. 24, footnote 50.

<sup>5</sup> Williams (2003), pp. 475–490.

<sup>6</sup> [‘The faithful’ were always ‘the strong ones.’]

In addition to the conscious historicism which distinguishes the operas by the non-Breton composers (Lalo and Lazzari) from the contemporary setting of Ropartz's *Le Pays*, all of the operas confirm Robert Stradling's (1998) assertion that:

[...] the names marked on our maps often have a significance far beyond their geographical place and topographical characteristics. Such named locations possess a latent power that may far exceed that justified by any local material infrastructure [...]. This power may be characterized as a force of endowing human identification.<sup>7</sup>

The libretti of *Le Pays*, *La Lépreuse* and *La Tour de feu* thus refer to precise locations in the province: the port of Paimpol, Ploumillau and the Pointe du Raz respectively. Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys* deals with a mythical location, Ys, and ancient Brittany, Armor, but is arguably topographically accurate since the printed versions of the legend, which inspired the opera, site the action in Douarnenez or Trégunc. Authentic place names were symbolic reminders of national territory, yet nonetheless clearly functioned as exotic markers because they contained vestiges of the centrally-suppressed regional language which defined the province as 'other'. The operas, then, clearly testify to Locke's recognition of the multi-faceted appeal of exoticist works which contained 'perceived differences from *and* resemblances to the home culture.'<sup>8</sup>

This ambivalent evocation of place is also musically reinforced by the inclusion of Breton folk tunes in all of the works interrogated here. Whilst the whole scale borrowing from the scores appended to the *Barsaz Breiz* in Lazzari's *La Lépreuse* was entirely covert, and, indeed, only came to light during the research for this study, composers, whilst retaining their own musical vocabularies, nevertheless deployed the Breton lament, the *gwerz* (Tual's lament in *Le Pays*) and actual regional folk

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Stradling, 'England's glory: sensibilities of place in English music, 1900–1950' in A. Leyshon, D. Matless and G. Revell, eds., *The Place of Music* (New York and London: The Guildford Press, 1998), p. 176.

<sup>8</sup> Locke (2009), p. 47. See also Chapter 1, p. 17.



tunes (the dances and Fishermen's song in *La Tour de feu*) to ensure regional musical verisimilitude.

Lalo's in-score labelling of the Breton folk tunes in *Le Roi d'Ys* equally provides clear evidence of the importance which composers attached to the provision of musical regional markers, whether these were overtly flagged, covertly inserted or, as in the case of Ropartz, less consciously and more instinctively deployed. However, the Breton folk instruments, the *bombarde* (shawm) and the *binou* (bagpipes) which were increasingly included in the significant iconography of the Breton cultural renaissance and which intensified the impact of regional costumes as the region subjected to imaginative colonization by central hegemony, were absent from the scores. Occasionally, their effects were reproduced, most notably in Ropartz's *Le Pays*, where the timbre of the *bombarde* is approximated by the oboe or *cor anglais*; nevertheless, the actual soundscape of the region was apparently less important to composers than the musical reproduction of its landscapes.



33: Jean Étienne Audfray, 1890, *Joueur de biniou koz (Pays de Quimper)*, oil on canvas, Musée des beaux arts, Quimper.

Yet the four operas are consistent in the ways in which they promote particular, stereotypical vistas with the potential to be implicated in the projection of a traditional landscape which was capable of contributing to ‘public utility’ by symbolically defining the nation. Whilst the diversity of the French landscape has always been a source of pride to Frenchmen and whilst more than one type of landscape could have been elected as symbolic of the French nation, the operas promote Brittany’s Atlantic coastline, its wild heathlands and mysterious forests as a **credible alternative to the other strong contenders** for the repository of the nation’s symbolic landscape, the Alps and the Mediterranean. Rugged seascapes and seaside or inland villages which are notable for their stone architecture and barely-discernable differentiation from their rocky surroundings predominate in all of the case studies.

A significant common element of the stage directions for the first acts of the operas set in Brittany is therefore the insistence on landscapes which conform to Renan's suggestion that: 'La pierre, en effet, semble le symbole naturel des races celtiques.'<sup>9</sup> In the final opera in this study, *La Tour de feu*, the representation of the 'traditional' landscape reaches its apotheosis. The initial stage directions demand the provision of: 'Au premier plan, à gauche, dernier vestige de l'époque celtique, un menhir' ('In the foreground, on the left, the last trace of the Celtic era, a menhir'). The rocky outcrop on which the lighthouse of the title is situated and the 'needle' of rock which is personified as 'La Chanteuse' ('The singer') are, however extreme manifestations of the rocky terrain which had long been established as the typical Breton landscape and which persisted in spite of actual regional geographical diversity.



34: A. F. Gorguet, 1888, Publicity Poster for *Le Roi d'Ys*

<sup>9</sup> ['Stone seems to be the natural symbol of the Celtic races.']

Ernest Renan, 'La Poésie des races celtiques', in *Essais de morale et de critique* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1928), p. 404.

The emerging concept of a 'traditional' Breton landscape was, moreover, strengthened by a conflation of its inanimate obdurate qualities and the contemporary perception of the character of its inhabitants. Bretons were, as Léon Durocher, in the anthology of regional poetry collected by the composer Ropartz noted, as hard as the rocks which surrounded them:

Têtus ! ... Les fils d'Arvor sont têtus: rien n'enchaîne  
Leur front que la brise âpre et vierge rembrunit,  
Dur ainsi que les flancs robustes du granit,  
Nouveux comme l'écorce intraitable du chêne.<sup>10</sup>

This characteristic stubbornness is a discernible trait not merely in the lighthouse keeper, who is drawn, in spite of extreme danger, to the voice of the 'singing rock', but in all of the male protagonists in the operas by Lazzari and Ropartz and in the ways in which they are narratively and musically conjured. It is, moreover, paradoxically presented as a laudable attribute and equally as the psychological flaw which guarantees their downfall. The exiled Tual in *Le Pays* thus rejects reality, love and security in order to pursue an ephemeral but obstinately maintained vision of his homeland. In Lazzari's *La Lépreuse*, Ervoanik is similarly constrained by his obdurate love for Aliette in spite of the persistent evidence of her infected status. The dogged inflexibility of the protagonists nonetheless allowed for the celebration of the Breton as the archetypal emblem of resistance, credited by Pasler as significant for defining national spirit and embodying opposition to cultural assimilation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Léon Durocher, 'Bretons têtus' in *Le Parnasse Breton Contemporain* (1889), p. 55.  
['Stubborn! The sons of Arvor (Brittany) are stubborn: nothing binds  
The brow that the harsh, pure breeze darkens.  
(They are) as hard as the solid granite hillsides,  
As knotted as the unyielding bark of the oak.']

<sup>11</sup> Pasler (2009), p. 657.



The equivocal presentation of Breton temperament is matched in the operas by a discourse centred on equally ambivalent responses to the ocean and to seascapes which are visually reproduced as elements of stage design or musically transmitted. Seascapes are introduced to foreground the honest toil of simple fisher-folk and to convey the nobility of their struggle with the elemental force of the ocean; equally, such seascapes, however picturesque, function as complex, extended metaphors for turbulent passions. Storms or shipwrecks are major features in three of the works studied here and the sea connotes the sublime in a way which inspires awe and terror in equal measures. The sea is, moreover used as a more universal trope of chaos and misrule, thus allowing composers or librettists to interrogate the contrast between ‘legitimizing’, stable, land-based identities with the ‘resistance’ identities which pertain when the final barrier between land and sea has been breached.<sup>12</sup> Maritime symbolism is nevertheless equally deployed as a specifically Breton *memento mori* which recalls the menacing proximity of the ocean to the province and its links with a unique regional history.

Whilst the most uncompromising acknowledgement of the hardships of Breton maritime existence occurs, unsurprisingly in the opera whose composer and librettist are natives of the province, Ropartz’s *Le Pays*, depictions of the ocean are universally equivocal. Tual’s dream in the last act of *Le Pays* conjures the gentle, nostalgic vision of the Paimpol fishing fleet and yet, from the beginning of the opera, his relationship with the sea and his dead comrades is made clear:

Maintenant tous, sauf celui qui te parle, tous dorment dans les eaux profondes .... Et la nuit j’entends leurs voix dans le vent, et ce sont des

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 16.

soupirs, des plaintes, des reproches, car les noyés n'ont pas leur compte et l'un d'eux manque à l'appel.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, whilst the serene sea is the backdrop for the peasant wedding in the first act of Lazzari's *La Tour de feu* and provokes the robust fishermen's chorus in the same opera, the raging tempest of the final act functions as a metaphor for the protagonists' unleashed passions and is instrumental in the process of dénouement and the final spectacle of the shipwreck. Indeed, in these operas, the sea frequently acquires the status of protagonist and is subject to personification or provokes anthropomorphic responses. In *La Tour de feu*, the sea, for Naïc, is thus 'la plus tendre des amies (the tenderest of friends.)

The inscription of such traditional landscapes into the cultural life of the nation was, however, particularly significant because, as Stradling further notes:

The power [of the sensibility of place] is released through cultural linguistic discourses and thus exerts an influence upon individuals and groups in society. Ultimately, therefore, this power is political.<sup>14</sup>

The political significance of invented or idealized images of regional life lay in their ability to legitimize national identity by nostalgically conjuring a stable, attractive vision of a local idyll which could, as we have seen, as equally be adopted both as the nation's image and as the depiction of the region. However, the political power of the regional landscape, as it was promoted in Breton operas, was also capable of shaping perceptions of the region in such a way that central cultural superiority was maintained. The representation of the region as wild and untamed meant that it could

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<sup>13</sup> ['Now they are all, apart from he who is speaking to you, sleeping beneath the deep waters. And at night I hear their voices in the wind, sighs, groans and reproaches, for the headcount of the drowned is incomplete and one of them failed to answer the roll call.']

<sup>14</sup> Stradling (1998), pp. 176–7.



function as a familiar, exotic ‘other’; however, it could concomitantly function as a backward ‘other’ and as a foil for notions of civilized progress which were rooted in the Enlightenment linear view of history and which valorised the city as the locus of refinement.

The Breton operas in this study were, with the exception of *Le Pays*, created by composers and librettists who were not natives of the region; inevitably directed towards the cultural tastes of the capital, they bear discernable traces of an ‘Orientalist’ strategy in their narratives and music because, as the introduction of this study posited, they reflect what Said recognizes as ‘a relationship of [central] power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony [...]’.<sup>15</sup> Wild landscapes and unyielding protagonists are, then, also conjured as the exotic antithesis of the civilized centre.<sup>16</sup> The carefully contrived photograph which marked the première of *La Lépreuse* in the February 1912 edition of *Musica* superimposes an image of the composer and librettist, Lazzari and Bataille, against the backdrop of Bailly’s design for the opening scene of the opera; the contrast between the ‘civilized’ elegance of the foreground figures and the savage landscape defined by the stone building, the wind-warped trees and the distant moor is a marked example of the ambivalent, symbiotic encounter between region and centre which was implicated in the provision of music as public utility.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Said (1995), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Williams (2003), pp. 475–490.

<sup>17</sup> *Musica*, 113 (1912), pp. 30–31.



Calvary and the means by which responses to disease and strategies of social exclusion are explored, whereas in *La Tour de feu*, the male protagonist's psychological degeneration is a reflection of the isolated, insular existence of which the locus of the lighthouse is an extreme paradigm. Parisian opera audiences were, then, presented in these 'Breton' operas with visions of provincial life which could only affirm their 'positional superiority'<sup>20</sup> and which would emphasize the extent of their status as progressive and civilized; the conventional relationship between colonizers and colonized was maintained and reinforced.

Although Joseph-Guy Ropartz was a native of Brittany, and his opera, *Le Pays*, depicts the region through the eyes of the yearning exile, a similar undercurrent of danger is present in both its libretto and music. The hero sighs for an apparent April idyll at home: 'la lande rayonne, c'est le printemps ; les pommiers ont déjà des fleurs sûrement.'<sup>21</sup> Yet his identity as a shipwrecked sailor is a constant reminder of the harsh economic realities of Breton coastal existence; the pull of the homeland brings about his physical and moral destruction and his most memorable aria is a lament, a *gwerz* which reinforces the perilous influence of the sea and the seductive call of home. This vision of maritime existence, conflated with the exotic, Icelandic setting, was equally capable of dealing central hegemony 'the upper hand'.<sup>22</sup>

What is to be concluded from this is that one of the traditions which the operas in the study established was the effective 'Bretonisation' of Brittany, a self-conscious exoticization of the region based on the presentation of a popular image which both

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<sup>20</sup> Said (1995), p. 7. See Chapter 1, pp. 17–18.

<sup>21</sup> ['the moors are blooming, it's spring; the apple trees are surely already blossoming.']

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

titillated and reassured central hegemony. This imaginary ‘colonial’ relationship, however, merely reflected actual fact; as Weber records:

The famous hexagon itself can be seen as a colonial empire shaped over the centuries: a complex of territories conquered, annexed and integrated in a political and administrative whole, many of them with strongly developed national or regional personalities, some of them with traditions that were specifically un- or anti- French.<sup>23</sup>

In the quest, whether intentional or unwitting, to resurrect or reinvent those regional traditions to serve political imperatives aimed at centralization and to integrate the life of the region with that of the nation, the judicious selection and manipulation of authentically Breton material was clearly crucial; as the case studies have demonstrated, only the narrative of *Le Pays* remained faithful to the Breton text, *L'Islandaise* by Charles le Goffic, which inspired its libretto.

The plots of all the operas in this study nevertheless exert narrative control over the region and its customs by selectively referring to its local costumes (with the exception of *Le Roi d'Ys*), by depicting its most salient and picturesque landscapes and by referring to its musical and dance traditions. Whilst the real Brittany remained largely as an elusive chimera, the dénouements of the operas unequivocally demonstrate that the deployment of *couleur locale* not only promulgated a consistent, popular image of the region, but invited the kind of narrative closure which resonated with ‘imaginative imperialism’, thus confirming Terry Eagleton’s assertion that:

A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself.

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<sup>23</sup> Weber (1976), p. 485.

In *Le Roi d'Ys*, the dénouement of the original libretto source, the legendary inundation and submerging of the fabled city, is subverted and the mythical kingdom of Ys is saved; in *La Lépreuse* the rural idyll is restored when the diseased lovers are consigned to the leper colony beyond the village boundaries. Similarly, the immolation of the lighthouse in *La Tour de feu* ensures that the acceptable face of Brittany which reposes in the stable life of a quaint and picturesque village is preserved unchanged. In addition, Tual's death in the Icelandic peat bog in *Le Pays* guarantees that the cherished images of his homeland remain unchallenged. The region is thus narratively constructed and contained to allow central hegemony to negotiate its relationship with its familiar, adjacent yet troublesome 'other' entirely advantageously.

Yet if the dénouements of these 'Breton' operas confirmed 'legitimizing' national identities,<sup>24</sup> their narratives were equally capable of transmitting undercurrents of powerful resistance to cultural centralization. Moreover, the extent to which the case studies conduct disquieting social critiques confirms the argument that *couleur locale* in these operas served public utility in specific and significant ways. Ropartz's *Le Pays* explores not only the fate of the exile but also the specific social plight of Breton fishermen who seasonally sailed in Icelandic waters in order to scrape a meagre existence and whose lives, as a consequence, were brief and brutal. Lazzari's *La Lépreuse* similarly explores changing sexual mores and social responses to disease in a comfortably distant mediaeval setting; the resonance of the issues for

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 16.

contemporary society nonetheless impacted on the initial staging and reception of the work.

Although Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys* arguably issues a more obvious political challenge by using a famous legend as a means of examining the ills of abdication and the nature of good governance, it can, as the relevant case study demonstrated, be perceived as an extended metaphor of the fate of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>25</sup> Lazzari's *Tour de feu* equally interrogates the processes of twentieth-century psychological disengagement and social alienation. These later Breton operas thus differ significantly from Meyerbeer's *Pardon de Ploërmel* where local colour provides spectacle and narrative cohesion. In direct contrast, their social critiques whether overtly or covertly expressed, rely directly on their regional markers for effective transmission and enduring impact.

A summary of the ways in which women are portrayed in the libretti and the music of these works also reveals the extent to which the operas reflected ongoing social change and thus contributed in their way to debates about shifts in personal or group identities. As the nineteenth century progressed, complex changes in perceptions of sexuality and relationships between the sexes occurred which seemed to augur social destabilization and sexual anarchy; however Eileen Showalter recognizes that:

In periods of cultural insecurity, when there are fears of regression and degeneration, the longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class and nationality, becomes especially intense. If the different races can be kept in their places, if the various classes can be held in the proper districts of the city, and if men and women can be fixed in their separate spheres, many hope, apocalypse can

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<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 110–12.



be prevented and we can preserve a comforting sense of identity and permanence in the face of that relentless spectre of millennial change.<sup>26</sup>

Female protagonists who seek to evade the 'separate sphere' to which they are assigned nevertheless occur in all of the case studies. Moreover, just as the image of the obdurate Breton contributed to the evocation of 'national spirit', so the alignment between the Celtic and Breton cultural markers which inform the literary sources of all the libretti proved a useful backdrop for the gendered discourse which is arguably transmitted and even augmented by the deployment of *couleur locale*.

Maryon McDonald has commented on the fact that the image of the Celt could be usefully deployed to oppose central hegemony because:

[...] the Celt took much of his shape in opposition to rationality, intellectuality and a materialist world of scientific and political manipulation. Instead of these the Celt has an artistic capacity beyond the ordinary, a religious instinct of unusual depth, a strength and profundity of thought and feeling but a weakness in the external world of action, a ready emotionality and an easy communion with nature, a strength in domesticity but a weakness in a wider political sphere, and a femininity.<sup>27</sup>

Gender-role ambivalence and expectations at variance with those experienced by the majority of nineteenth-century Frenchwomen are similarly reflected in the operatic heroines in these operas which drew on Celtic legend and folklore. The corpus of Breton operas is, in addition, rich in its provision of female protagonists who progressively challenge the boundaries of patriarchal domination and defy operatic norms.

Of the operas in the study, then, only the first, Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys* presents a female protagonist, Rozenn, who conforms to the nineteenth-century ideal of 'the angel of

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<sup>26</sup> Showalter (2001), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 86.

the hearth', the model which had been successfully promoted by Meyerbeer's *Dinorah*. Lalo's *Rozenn*, however, is musically and dramatically eclipsed by her malign and powerful sister, Margared and does not appear in the original literary source which inspired the opera. It is nonetheless Margared's encoded regional identity which is significant for a full understanding of the female protagonists in later 'Breton' operas and of the ways in which they assisted composers and librettists to conduct a range of social critiques. Since Margared is the operatic representation of Dahut, the legendary character who controls the seas and returns to the ocean when she can no longer wreak havoc on earth, she is equally the exemplar of that most prevalent and significant of Breton and Celtic folkloric heroines, the siren.

All of the operas considered in the main body of this study are concerned in diverse ways with women who sing 'siren-songs'. However, whilst contemporary musicology deploys the symbol of the siren as a convenient metaphor for the examination of a range of feminist and post-feminist concerns relating to the interpretation or re-evaluation of patriarchally-inflected gender relationships in opera, composers of Breton operas consistently deployed that symbol within their actual works. Moreover, the complex, ambivalent identity of the siren in Breton folklore — an identity which encompasses the designation of the siren in Christian folklore as a seductive embodiment of evil, a destructive feminine other, but which equally draws on earlier, Celtic evocations of an atavistic, watery androgyne — provided composers and librettists with a conveniently wide-ranging cultural symbol with which to confront the diverse and shifting perceptions of women and the transitional gender-role expectations which pertained as the *fin de siècle* gave way to the early twentieth century.

Whilst Lalo's Margared apparently represents the conventional siren whose wayward sexuality menaces social and familial stability and challenges established patriarchy, the female protagonists in later operas are progressively characterized by their possession of equivocal 'siren' traits which link them to the other water spirits of Breton folklore who are 'moins virulente moins dangereuse que les autres puisqu' [...] capable de repentir',<sup>28</sup> who, having emanated from the 'other world' are sullied by human contact, or who are simply beyond the compass of normal moral and social imperatives. Cixous and Clément, in their landmark, feminist study of 'a woman's place', would suggest that such protagonists sing:

[...] from a perhaps mythical time before the law (that is before paternal or phallogocentric law) when women's voices were not yet relegated to hierarchical separation or [...] to the 'edges of imposed silence'.<sup>29</sup>

When female protagonists in later Breton operas emerge as sirens whose identity is conventionally revealed by their connection with the ocean, moreover, they assert that identity directly through diegetic interludes in which their song is part of the fictional, on-stage world rather than of the artificial operatic soundscape. In these moments of diegesis, when audience and on-stage protagonists alike are susceptible to its influences, the siren-song, in Breton operas, takes on an augmented, threefold significance. Firstly it is complicit in establishing the tradition of Brittany as a borderland where the nexus of magic, the eternal feminine and the idealized landscapesubvert all that is expected, real or known. Secondly, it asserts the undertow of resistance to central hegemony and its legitimizing identities; moreover,

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<sup>28</sup>['less virulent or less dangerous because they are capable of repentance.']  
Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h (2000), p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 93.

since the province — in French, ‘la Bretagne’ — is personified as feminine,<sup>30</sup> it opposes legitimizing patriarchy with a specifically feminine voice which is substantially supported by a network of complex regional markers. Finally, it revalorises and strengthens Breton cultural identity itself by deploying a cultural symbol — that of the siren, the woman from the ‘other world’ — which equates Breton identity with its more comprehensive Celtic counterpart.

Ropartz’s Kaethe in *Le Pays* is Icelandic rather than Breton but fulfils the role of the siren in that it is she who provides the diegetic interlude with the phenomenal siren song designed to keep the exiled Breton sailor Tual at her side and far from Brittany. In addition she resembles the siren in that she takes Tual, who is not of her own race or kind, as a lover and is ultimately forced to relinquish him; more importantly, perhaps, she is narratively in binary opposition to the homeland for which Tual yearns; her character allows the composer to explore the Breton obsession with the sea and to present the ocean and the province as equal and competing ‘siren others’. Yet, in spite of these undeniable siren qualities, she is also characterized as possessing quiet endurance and of acting altruistically with Tual’s best interests at heart.

Aliette in Lazzari’s *La Lépreuse* is, in contrast, the only ‘land-locked’ female protagonist in the study. Nevertheless, her siren identity is clear and she is no less the ‘femme de l’autre monde’, the woman from the beyond, than the other sirens of Breton legend; she comes from the ‘other world’ of the leper colony, the world of the lost ‘living dead’ and her presence among the living is a perpetual *memento mori*, a

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<sup>30</sup> The frontispiece of this study illustrates this assigned femininity.

function fulfilled in the other operas by the presence of the sea. The duplicitous power which derives from her errant sexuality is clearly projected and her siren-song, the central aria of the second act, is a subversive lullaby. In addition, her redemptive qualities in the closing moments of the opera suggest an ambivalent female identity capable of sacrificial repentance. The depiction of female menace is ultimately balanced, therefore, by the assertion of transcendent atonement.

In Lazzari's *La Tour de feu*, Naïc's siren identity is explicitly stated and diegetically recognized by on-stage protagonists; nevertheless, she is presented as victim rather than as menace. Although emotionally threatened by the social conventions of her Breton village and by Yves' attempts to confine her within the lighthouse, she is not, consciously destructive. Equally, her 'siren song' does not represent a universal danger since it is beyond the comprehension of the village community and her containment is metaphorically projected as the incalculable loss of her ethereal spiritual qualities. The presence of the 'singing rock', La Chanteuse, whose music is diegetically heard but absent from the operatic soundscape, moreover, visibly and symbolically declares the dangers attendant upon the suppression of the feminine 'voice'. In this work, then, the feminine voice is esteemed even as its vulnerability is acknowledged. Whilst the opera, as a late work, does not demonstrate notable new directions in Lazzari's musical language, it marks a significant point in the cultural trajectory from the nineteenth-century 'domestic angel' and her counterpart, the predatory siren, to the woman of the new age, feted and anticipated by the *vaginards* as the new century was ushered in.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The term '*vaginards*' was used by journalists and critics intent on disparaging male pro-feminist writers who anticipated social change.

The wind of social change can also be detected in the approaches to religion adopted in the operas and their libretti and in the ways in which they modified the image of Brittany as the land of the picturesque *Pardon* where simple piety and ‘vague mysticism’, underpinned by superstition, theatrically represented ‘the melancholic nature of the region’s landscape and the perpetual grayness of its atmosphere.’<sup>32</sup> Meyerbeer’s immensely popular *Pardon de Ploërmel* (1859) undoubtedly played a significant role in the promotion of the Breton religious festivals as iconic and regionally-defining, so that, by the 1870s, paintings which focused on these overt displays of piety and which depicted women in traditional *coiffes* which amplify their collective status as ‘domestic nuns’ were prevalent.<sup>33</sup> The theatrical possibilities of the Pardons were amplified by the fact that: ‘What outsiders to the region commonly understood as “authentic” Breton dress was the clothing worn principally during communal and religious occasions [...]’.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, whilst subsequent Breton operas varied in their deployment of regional costume, they were highly equivocal in their treatment of religion.

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Orwicz, ‘Criticism and Representations of Brittany in the Early Third Republic’, *Art Journal*, ‘The Political Unconscious in Nineteenth-Century Art’, 46 (1987), p. 294.

<sup>33</sup> Paintings of Pardons by Dagnan-Bouveret featured in the Salons of 1887 and 1889. Other notable artists who chose the same subject were: Eugène Boudin (1865), Jules Breton (1891), Théophile-Louis Deyrolle and Jean Pegot-Ogier.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Young, ‘Fashioning Heritage: Regional Costume and Tourism in Brittany, 1890–1937’, *Journal of Social History*, 42 (2009), pp. 631–656





36: Pascal Adolphe Jean Dagnan Bouveret, 1889, *Les Bretonnes au Pardon*, oil on canvas, Lisbon, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian

The conventional religiosity demonstrated by the populace in *Le Roi d'Ys* is, therefore, replaced by pagan Icelandic superstition in Ropartz's *Le Pays*. In Lazzari's *Lépreuse*, Christian responses to disease are shown to be inadequate and the familiar ritual of the burial service is subverted by the substitution of the Mass of Separation which guarantees a living death for the two main protagonists. In addition, although *La Tour de feu* includes a wedding tableau, references to religion are absent; as the emotional focus of the opera shifts to the restricted space of the lighthouse, the trope for social alienation in the industrialized world, conventional Christian religion is replaced by secular angst or by the reassertion of Celtic pagan beliefs which relate to the presence of the siren. The abandonment of religion in the process of establishing new traditions indicates that Breton operas increasingly responded to contemporary anticlericalism during the Third Republic.

The symbolic siren and the metamorphosis of the erstwhile religious identity of the province thus assisted composers and librettists to establish the tradition of Brittany as a liminal zone which culturally and psychologically represented the threshold between the familiar world of central hegemony and an exotic borderland where dangerous landscapes, spirituality aligned with dubious magic, obdurate masculinity and ambivalent femininity prevailed. Yet, whilst the operas were consistently informed by Breton folklore, its literary canon and La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz* in particular, the *couleur locale* on which they depended for their impact had little to do with ephemeral or superficial spectacle. This final evaluation of the evidence from the four case-study operas has, moreover, consistently confirmed that the regional cultural markers deployed by their composers and librettists served significant, complex and shifting social functions. Their potential to operate, within their own contemporary cultural contexts, as repositories of socially-cohesive invented or resurrected traditions and, as a direct consequence, of their ability to contribute to 'public utility' by helping to reshape perceptions of individual and national belonging, conclusively demonstrates their powerful resonance; they constituted, as the central argument of the introduction to this study posited, a 'familiar anchor' in the 'turbulence and uncertainty' of the early Third Republic.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that additional 'Breton operas' remain to be studied<sup>36</sup> and that the future reception of these regional works remains uncertain since, although they constitute a Breton operatic canon, they are, for the most part, performed infrequently or not at all. Paradoxically, having contributed to the assertion of a defined French musical identity, and in the wake of the perceived achievement of that

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix 1, p. 379.

goal, they have been displaced by the major works of the operatic canon whose origins no longer menace the nation's image.

Nevertheless, their eventual revival is a distinct possibility in the current cultural context of overwhelming globalization in which, as Raphael Samuel records, the process of 'resurrectionism', or self-conscious historicism, has guaranteed 'a pole of opposition to the modernizations of the time.'<sup>37</sup> Alongside this re-evaluation of the past which manifests itself in nostalgia for the recent as well as the distant past must be set a renaissance of interest in regional identities. Castells recognizes that 'The search for identity as an antidote to economic globalization and political disfranchisement also permeates below the level of the nation-state, adding new dynamism to regions and cities around Europe.'<sup>38</sup> Breton operas, then, seem to be primed with all the necessary attributes to ensure their own resurrection.

Moreover, if, as Henry Glassie asserts, tradition is really 'the creation of the future out of the past' and the 'artful assembly of materials from the past, designed for usefulness in the future', then the Celtic markers of identity, which all the operas in this study transmit, would, in particular, seem to increase their chances of revival.<sup>39</sup> In the post-modern, multi-cultural and secular world in which identity is ever more fluid, reflexive, consciously selected and exposed to a myriad of possible alternative models, Celticity offers an alternative 'imagined community' to which an individual can aspire to belong without necessarily being constrained by a sense of previously fixed ethnic, linguistic or religious identities. Indeed, as Marion Bowman points out,

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<sup>37</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. 1: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 139–50.

<sup>38</sup> Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 346–54.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Glassie 'Tradition', *Journal of American Folklore*, 108, (1995), p. 35.

‘In the present Celtic revival, there is strong evidence that the Celts are still thought of as the romantic ‘other’, signifying that which is lost but longed for in contemporary life, whether in terms of community, characteristics or spirituality.’<sup>40</sup>

The interest in Celticity which, in part, fuelled the Breton renaissance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, may yet provoke the reappraisal of Breton operas in the twenty-first.

### **The frame, 2: *Magicienne de la mer***

Cloches des vieilles tours, cloches crépusculaires,  
 Pleurez votre souffrance en vos robes fêlées,  
 Et vos gémissements aux calmes envolées  
 Berceront nos dédains, nos mépris, nos colères.<sup>41</sup>

This study was framed in the first instance by Meyerbeer’s significant contribution to the ‘Breton operatic canon’, *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*, a work which, in part, derived its appeal from its foundation on multiple Breton literary, folkloric sources. However, the extent to which later works built on Meyerbeer’s foundation, successively enhanced the regional symbolism and extended the functions of Breton markers on the lyrical stage can best be evaluated by a brief interrogation of one final opera, *Magicienne de la mer* (Opéra-Comique, 1954). This work, which was by the native Breton composer, Paul Le Flem,<sup>42</sup> was produced a hundred years on from the time when Meyerbeer first began to investigate the potential of the libretto by Barbier and

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<sup>40</sup> Marion Bowman, ‘From Keltoi to Cybercelts: Continuity and Change in Celtic Identities’ in Mark Pittaway, ed., *Globalization and Europe* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2003), p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> [‘Bells in old towers, twilight bells,  
 Weep out your suffering in your crazed gowns,  
 And your vibrations, sent forth on the calm air  
 Will cradle our scorn, our contempt, our anger.’]

Édouard Beaufils, ‘Les Cloches’, *Le Parnasse Breton Contemporain*, 1889, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Le Flem (Radon, 13 March 1881–31 July 1984, Tréguier).

Carré that would become his second comic opera. It aptly demonstrates the links which bind all the operas in the study; equally, it nevertheless presents ample evidence of the fluidity of the identities which can be expressed in regionally specific operas and of the extent to which the traditions established by the earlier operas lend themselves to endless re-invention.

Le Flem's *Magicienne* was based, as were its predecessors, on a work from the Breton literary canon, and on the same story from La Villemarqué's *Barsaz Breiz* which had inspired Édouard Lalo in the preceding century,<sup>43</sup> that of the drowned city of Ys and the legendary Dahut. However, Le Flem's response to the original story was committed and complex and his lifelong interest in the 'siren theme' ensured that it became a leitmotif in his output. His first reference to Dahut came in the 1908 chorus for female voices, *Crépuscule d'Armor* for which he provided his own libretto; the second was the opera *Magicienne de la mer*, based on a libretto by José Bruyr. Finally, in 1967, when the composer was in his eighties, he returned to the 'siren theme' to produce an imagined sequel to the earlier opera, *La Maudite*; the first part of the libretto of this work, which was premièred on the radio in 1972, was also based on the *Barsaz Breiz* text, although the second part was, once again, the composer's own contribution.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, whilst the libretto of *Magicienne* drew its inspiration from La Villemarqué's 'La Submersion de la Ville d'Ys', its narrative content and dramatic action differed

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<sup>43</sup> Le Flem also composed the one-act 'lyrical fantasy', *Le Rossignol de Saint Malo* (1938) which was similarly based on a *Barsaz Breiz* story (*Le Rossignol*, XX).

<sup>44</sup> Le Flem, a Breton speaker, had a lifelong interest in the folklore of the province and gave radio talks on the subject between 1946–1950. See Michel Lemeu, 'Paul Le Flem, les musiques de la mer', *ArMen*, 54 (1993), p. 7.

significantly from Blau's rendition of the legend for Lalo's *Roi d'Ys*. Whereas Lalo, in 1875, set the legend in the distant past and thereby arguably confronted the contemporary social issues of his own time by conveniently refracting them through the lens of a lost medieval world, *Le Flem* presents the character of Dahut as a living reality and the city of Ys as a constant presence; in so doing, he engages with the age-old Breton conflicted obsession with the sea as seducer and provider and as an inescapable *memento mori*.

The realism of the action is, moreover, underpinned by the nature of the three tableaux which constitute the opera, by the stage designs and by the costumes. The first tableau, 'Au café des pêcheurs', is set in a bar in South Finistère where fishermen have gathered to drink and where the young sailor, Yannick Fantec sings a *gwerz*, a traditional lament, about the legendary siren, Dahut, to the accompanying disbelief of the other fishermen; the second tableau, 'La Nuit de la légende' is a dream sequence which takes place in Dahut's palace, and in which the destruction of the fabled city of Ys occurs. The final tableau, 'De Grève ... de Rêve', returns to the original setting of the bar where the sailors waken Yannick before putting to sea once more.<sup>45</sup> The contemporary setting and the focus on the contained, public space of the bar in the outer tableaux thus avoid any evocation of the picturesque landscape which had been a feature of the stage designs and dramatic action of the earlier operas; nevertheless, in the dream sequence, *Le Flem* intentionally retained and transmitted the essential narrative of the legend of Dahut, the Mary Morgane or mermaid, in an unadulterated form which remained entirely faithful to its folkloric origins.

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<sup>45</sup> See *La Bretagne à l'Opéra* (1994), pp. 96–9.



Similarly, the costume designs, by Maurice Moulène, reflect shifts in attitudes to traditional Breton dress whilst nonetheless retaining a vestige of the *couleur locale* which earlier composers had exploited to varying degrees. The costume design for Maryvonne, the local beauty for whose attention the sailors vie in the opening tableau, reproduces the traditional costume of the *pays Bigouden* at the turn of the century; moreover, this representation of Breton feminine national costume is the most specific and regionally accurate of all the costumes designed for female protagonists in the operas within the present study.



37: Maurice Moulène, 1954, 'Maryvonne', Crayon et gouache,<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Costumes for *Magicienne de la mer*, Paris, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, D216.

Nevertheless, the design is neither unwittingly anachronistic nor self-indulgently nostalgic; it reflects the conscious reaffirmation of heritage and the determined recognition of traditional dress in particular as ‘a privileged marker of Breton cultural continuity’<sup>47</sup> which were features of the attempts to salvage a supposedly fragile regional inheritance during the first half of the nineteenth century. Such attempts were manifest in new museum displays of costume, newly ‘invented’ traditional festivals within the region which promoted the competitive wearing of traditional dress, and even similar ‘regional’ Breton festivals in Paris which aimed to cater as much for the ever-increasing population of Breton émigrés in the capital as for its own bourgeois élites.<sup>48</sup>

However the costume designs for *Magicienne* also account for the establishment of a new, alternative, Breton ‘uniform’ which relates to the region’s maritime heritage. The sailors and fishermen are not distinguished by the ‘special’ costumes designed for festivals and Pardons; they wear the practical working clothes of their calling. Significantly, the generic, maritime costume designs for Yannick and the crew are entirely modern; they remain as instantly recognizable Breton regional markers in the twenty-first century and are exploited touristically to this day on an equal footing with the more picturesque and ornamental *coiffes* and layered dresses which have always defined feminine regional dress for ‘outsiders’. The costumes for *Magicienne* were thus complicit in establishing and reflecting new traditions which were less clearly implicated in political imperatives to create or maintain the nation’s image and

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<sup>47</sup> Young (2009), p. 634.

<sup>48</sup> Young (2009) cites the Fête des Fleur d’Ajoncs (Pont Aven, 1905), Fête des Reines de Cornouaille (Quimper, 1922) and the Fête des Filets Bleus (Concarneau, 1907) as events which promoted a revalorisation of ‘traditional’ regional costume.

Le Flem was an enthusiastic attendee of similar traditional music festivals in the province. See Michel Lemeu (1993), p. 7.

yet more responsive to a range of complex, cultural and psychological demands for the retrieval, and even resurrection, of disappearing provincial modes of existence. They nevertheless demonstrate that the growing solicitude for regional resurrectionism provoked the modification of cherished regional markers in the face of economic change, cultural mobility, demographic shifts and the increasing role of tourism in the economic survival of the province. As Patrick Young notes: ‘traditional costume could now [...] be a medium of exchange, through which lived and ongoing experiences of continuity and change were symbolically enacted.’<sup>49</sup>



38 : Maurice Moulène, 1954, ‘Fantec’, Crayon et gouache <sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Young (2009), p. 647.

<sup>50</sup> Costumes for *Magicienne de la mer*, Paris, Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, D216.

Such experiences of continuity and change are, moreover, symbolically asserted during the first scene when Maryvonne, irritated by the behaviour of the boisterous sailors complains ‘Vous fripez trop ma coiffe blanche et mon tablier blanc !’.<sup>51</sup> Her heightened sensitivity to her costume and its defining characteristics, which are thus both verbally and visually asserted, is nonetheless brutally countered by the sailors’ response: ‘Mais que veux tu que ça nous fasse ? Un tablier ça se repasse. Une coiffe aussi bien !’<sup>52</sup> Whilst the sexual overtones of the exchange are clear enough, they are also underpinned by a parallel, symbolic re-enactment of the loss and devaluing of regional dress and of the immediate possibilities of its revival.

The accurate representation of Breton maritime existence in the two outer tableaux can be accounted for by the fact that Le Flem was, like Ropartz, a Breton native and, indeed, *Magicienne* and *Le Pays* share common, uncompromising responses to the plight of Breton fishermen and to mortality at sea.<sup>53</sup> However, Le Flem’s treatment of the legend of Dahut and the drowned city is innovative in that it not only makes use of a double narrative but does so in such a way that, whilst the central tableau presents a dream sequence, the real and the unreal aspects of the drama are seamlessly merged.<sup>54</sup> Thus at the end of the first act Dahut physically appears to the sailors in the mundane setting of the fishermen’s bar. Whilst her legendary, supernatural identity is instantly confirmed by her declaration ‘Hommes, je suis Dahut la Magicienne. Et vous êtes chez moi à Ker Ys de la mer’,<sup>55</sup> it is immediately evident that her symbolic significance is multi-layered. Her advent is heralded by the

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<sup>51</sup> [‘You’re crumpling my white *coiffe* and my white apron too much!’]

<sup>52</sup> [‘What’s that got to do with us? An apron can be re-ironed. And so can a *coiffe*.’]

<sup>53</sup> Le Flem and Ropartz corresponded.

<sup>54</sup> This combination of reality and the supernatural is frequently cited as the reason for the failure of the work. It was withdrawn after four performances.

<sup>55</sup> [‘Gentlemen, I am Dahut, the Sorceress. And you are at home with me in (the palace of) Ker Ys of the sea.’]

return of a drowned sailor's body and, since she indicates to the sailors that their fragile lives and inevitable deaths are governed by the passion which draws them to her, it is clear that she metaphorically represents both the ocean and the fishermen's fate; she is the personification of the obsessive desire for the ocean which will lead the sailors to their inexorable doom.

The second tableau, the supposed dream sequence, presents the sailors' encounter with Dahut within the city of Ys as an orgiastic revel in which one sailor, Maël, is singled out for Dahut's attentions and which provokes the captain into killing the guardian of the locks and opening the sluices that once protected the magical city from inundation. Yet, although the final tableau returns the dramatic action to the mundane reality of the bar, and although Yannick is the only reveller who ultimately recalls that he has witnessed the annihilation of Ys, the allegorical significance of the legend is proclaimed by the diegetic sounding of the lost bells of Ys which are audible to the protagonists in the on-stage world and to the audience alike. Moreover, the conflation of legend and reality which is conveyed in this sound which fractures the stillness in both the surreal and real worlds is reinforced by Yannick's final cry to the sorceress: 'Je t'arrive, Dahut, inaccessible but du vieux rêve qui nous fait vivre.'<sup>56</sup> In this final statement, then, which irrevocably blurs the border between dream and reality, the promotion of Brittany as an exotic, liminal zone where imminent, dangerous magic is eternally primed to spontaneously subvert the security of everyday existence, and where the eternal feminine is conflated with the lure of the ocean, seems to reach its apotheosis.

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<sup>56</sup> ['I am coming to you, Dahut, unattainable goal of the old dream which gives us life.']



However, with this work, regional opera broke new ground; rather than inventing or resurrecting regional traditions aimed at the construction or maintenance of the nation's image, or simply contributing to the inscription of a sense of shared past on a nascent national consciousness, *Magicienne* flagged the possibility that the regionally-defined Breton opera had, in the cumulative process of constructing Brittany as a significant and desirable 'lieu de mémoire'<sup>57</sup> established itself as a tradition in its own right. That tradition enshrined the regionally-defined cultural artefact, in this case the lyrical drama, as an act of consciously performed heritage; moreover, that performance was so compelling that it was likely to be instrumental in reshaping the region's own perceptions of its cultural inheritance by valorising, preserving and staging particular practices and cultural markers which would otherwise have fallen into obscurity. The later operas in this study thus include a modified form of the Breton *gwerz*, the traditional lament which Le Flem recalls as an element of the entertainment during long winter evenings in his childhood when he heard '[...] les derniers aèdes du siècle débiter, sans trouble de mémoire, d'interminables scènes, extraites de pièces bretonnes dont la longueur défiait le temps.'<sup>58</sup>

*Magicienne* nevertheless demonstrates quite unequivocally that a tradition had been established in which Breton opera itself seems to have been framed as an extended, ritual lament; it completes the process which raises the expectation that the work will embody a continuing, sorrowful expression of lost rural idylls, the menacing encroachment of modernity or disappearing maritime practices. In its conscious

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<sup>57</sup>['A site of memory'] This refers to the title and the concept which underpins the extensive, seminal work on French identity and memory edited by Pierre Nora (1997).

<sup>58</sup> '[...] the last bards of the century declaiming effortlessly from memory parts of Breton ballads whose length challenged time itself.']  
Le Flem, cited in Lemeu (1993), p. 4.



performance of heritage, it paradoxically mourns the passing of the worlds conjured by a consistent range of common folkloric libretto sources, even as it acknowledges and benefits from the fluidity of the regional symbols which contain the potential to ensure its continued survival in the post-industrial world and in the face of globalization. Le Flem codified the lament in terms of his own Breton identity:

On ne quitte pas le coin où l'enfance fut bercée, où l'on a entendu des chants incomparables, parlé une langue d'une richesse et d'une ductilité inouïes sans en garder le souvenir et sans leur vouer une affection, un amour que les distances augmentent et que l'absence exaspère. Vous devinez sans peine ce qui peut se passer dans l'âme de ces exilés, de ces déracinés, de ces habitués de larges horizons, condamnés désormais à contempler des bâtisses altières qui disputent à leur regard la libre possession du ciel et la jouissance de la lumière. Alors, la nostalgie s'introduit en eux et flotte sur leur émoi. Le noir s'infiltre dans les sentes les plus repliées de leur souvenir. Un infini sentiment de langueur et même d'accablement les envahit, et les traces de cet envoûtement à distance se retrouveront dans les musiques conçues sous l'influence du leitmotiv de la mélancolie.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, in acknowledging these tensions between region and centre, past and present, fixed rural idylls and fractured, fluid identities and between longing and loss, he inevitably frames a melancholic aspiration towards performed heritage. This conscious performance, the projection of 'la Bretagne bretonnante' ('Bretonising Brittany') within regionally-specific operas, has the potential to negotiate those seemingly irreconcilable states for indigenous or adoptive Bretons and for contemporary hegemony alike.

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<sup>59</sup> ['You don't leave the spot where you were cradled in your childhood, where you heard incomparable songs uttered in a language (marked by) its richness and pliability without retaining their memory and according them an affection, a love which distance only serve to augment and which absence exasperates. You can guess without difficulty what happens in the soul(s) of these exiles, these uprooted (individuals) who are accustomed to wide horizons but nonetheless condemned to gaze at lofty buildings which contend for their unrestrained outlook on the sky and their full enjoyment of the light. Thus nostalgia enters into them and hovers on the surface of their emotions. Darkness penetrates even the most twisted paths of their memory. An infinite feeling of languor and even of dejection invades them and the traces of this bewitchment at a distance emerge in the music which has been conceived under the influence of the leitmotiv of melancholy.']  
Ibid., p. 4.

## WORKS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Significant operas in the Breton canon which it has not been possible to include here because of the constraints of space remain to be studied; the most notable are:

1. Sylvio Lazzari (1895), *Armor*
2. Camille Erlanger (1897), *Kermaria*
3. Charles Tournemire (1904), *Le Sang de la Sirène*
4. Gabriel Dupont (1910), *La Glu*
5. Paul Le Flem (1942), *Le Rossignol de Saint Malo*
6. Paul Le Flem (1967), *La Maudite*

In addition to these operas, ballets which refer significantly to the region, its narratives, costume and music, also present rich sources for further enquiry:

7. Charles-Marie Widor (1880), *La Korrrigane*
8. Adolphe Piriou (1936), *Le Rouet d'Armor* ( a 'choreographic legend' with choirs and soloists)
9. Paul Ladmirault (1926), *La Prêtresse de Koridwen*

## PLOT SYNOPSES

### *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*

#### **Act I**

On the eve of Dinorah's wedding and the local Pardon, sorcery is in the air. Dinorah's fortune is lost and her bridegroom, Hoël, has disappeared. She goes mad and pursues her goat, Belah, erratically. Hoël, however, in an attempt to restore Dinorah's fortune, has gone treasure-seeking with Corentin, the bagpiper.

#### **Act II**

In the Cursed Valley, the treasure-seekers are about to claim their fortune when Dinorah is seen to fall into a raging torrent. Hoël rescues her; the magic spell is lifted and, although the treasure is lost, honest love triumphs.

### *Le Roi d'Ys*

#### **Act I**

The people of Ys are celebrating the end of the war which has been achieved by the betrothal of their princess, Margared, and the enemy prince, Karnac. The two princesses, Margared and Rozenn appear. Rozenn, detecting Margared's concealed distress, expresses her concern. Margared denies her unhappiness and asserts her pride in the dynastic contract; she reveals that she has previously loved another man who has perished. Rozenn similarly declares her love for Mylio, a warrior who is also presumed dead. Once Rozenn is alone, Mylio emerges unharmed and the lovers declare their happiness.

The king enters with Karnac and declares that Margared will rule Ys with Karnac at her side. However, Margared notices Mylio in the throng and refuses to marry the enemy prince. Mylio and Karnac declare their mutual hatred and the people of Ys rally to their hero.

#### **Act II**

Alone, Margared reveals that she desires Mylio, but acknowledges that he loves Rozenn. Unhinged by unrequited love, she is consumed with hatred for all that she once valued. She hides as Mylio, Rozenn and the king enter. The imminent battle is discussed and Mylio declares his faith in the benevolent protection of Saint Corentin, the patron saint of Brittany. Mylio and the king leave to join the fighting. Margared

wishes for Mylio's death and Rozenn finally understands the extent of her sister's malice.

Mylio and the army of Ys are victorious, and the populace depart for the chapel to give thanks to Saint Corentin. Margared incites the defeated Karnac to vengeance by suggesting that he should unlock the sluice-gates that protect Ys from the ocean. He agrees; however, outside the chapel, Corentin's tomb miraculously opens; the saint appears and begs Margared to repent.

### **Act III**

The wedding of Mylio and Rozenn takes place. Karnac exhorts Margared to hold to her plan and taunts her with imaginary scenes of the wedding night of the newly-married couple. Margared and Karnac leave, united in their commitment to harm.

Mylio leaves the king alone with Rozenn. As father and daughter express the wish that Margared will return unharmed to her family, a dreadful rushing noise announces that the sluices have been opened and that a deluge threatens. Margared appears and is forgiven; Mylio also re-emerges to reveal that he has killed Karnac. Margared refuses to escape and declares that if the sea is given its 'prey', the inundation will cease; she confesses her guilt and, as the crowd calls for her destruction, she throws herself into the ocean. A vision of Saint Corentin appears and the waves subside.

## ***Le Pays***

### **Act I**

Tual, a Breton sailor, has been shipwrecked on the coast of Iceland at Fifa-fjord and nursed back to health by Kaethe, with whom he is in love, and her father Jörgen. The polar winter approaches; although Kaethe fears that Tual will eventually return to Brittany, he declares his intention to remain. Jörgen gives his blessing to the union of the lovers and Tual swears fidelity on the shore of the treacherous peat bog, the Hrafuaga, which will, according to tradition, swallow him alive if he breaks his oath.

### **Act II**

Tual is boatbuilding on the shore; he daydreams about Brittany and the imminent arrival of the Breton fishing fleet. Kaethe arrives and reveals that she is pregnant; secure in Tual's affections, she sings a ballad about faithful love.

Inside Jörgen's *badstofa*, Kaethe awaits the arrival of Jörgen and Tual. She fears Tual's longing for his Breton homeland and is dismayed when Jörgen subsequently reveals to Tual that the first Breton fishing smacks have arrived in Seidisfjord, a port beyond the frozen Hrafuaga. That night, Tual dreams of the Breton fishing fleet; when Kaethe wakes she finds that he has gone to rejoin his countrymen. The sound of

breaking ice and the cries of the sinister crows proclaim that the Hrafuaga is thawing; Kaethe, collapsing, describes Tual's last moments as he is consumed by the peat bog.

## ***La Lépreuse***

### **Act I**

In an inland Breton village, a farm awakes. The village washerwomen gossip about their clients and discuss the problem of leprosy in the community. They mention Aliette, a young girl who is a suspected leper but who is still 'at large' in village society. The farmer and his wife, Matelinn and Maria, greet their son, Ervoanik, and he asks for permission to go to the religious Pardon with his sweetheart, Aliette. His parents are appalled and a family row ensues. Aliette knocks on the door and asks to be admitted but Matelinn makes it clear that he will never sanction Aliette's marriage to Ervoanik. Alone, consoling each other, the lovers hear the church bells which call them to the Pardon.

### **Act II**

Old Tili, Aliette's mother, attempts to entice the village children with infected sweetmeats but is interrupted by the Seneschal who threatens her with removal to the leper colony. Aliette and Ervoanik arrive at Tili's cottage on the way to the Pardon; whilst Ervoanik sleeps, Aliette sings a lullaby in which she reveals her desperate love for Ervoanik and the fact that she has infected other young men with leprosy. Tili, intent on revenge on village society, falsely informs Aliette that Ervoanik has fathered children with another village girl. Mother and daughter then seal Ervoanik's fate by offering him an infected drink.

### **Act III**

The villagers arrive for the ceremony that will formally dispatch Ervoanik to the 'white houses' of the leper colony. Maria, previously unaware of Ervoanik's whereabouts and illness learns of his infected status; when her son appears, she attempts to console him and the strength of her maternal love becomes apparent. Matelinn forgives Ervoanik, but the young man, realizing that his fate is imminent, begs to be concealed. The priest and Seneschal conduct the 'Mass of Separation'; however, at the last minute Aliette interrupts the tragic scene to accompany Ervoanik to the 'white houses'.

## ***La Tour de feu***

### **Act I**

In an island village off the west coast of Brittany, the villagers celebrate the wedding of the lighthouse keeper, Yves, and his childhood sweetheart, Naïc. Amid the festivities, the bride and groom declare their love whilst the jealous pilot, Yann, surreptitiously asserts his animosity towards the couple. Yann leaves to guide a ship into the harbour; he returns in the company of a mysterious captain, Don Jacintho. As the wedding dances continue, Yann maliciously draws the stranger's attention to the bride's beauty and reveals that she is not a native village girl but that she was washed up in the fishing nets as a baby; he also tells the captain the story of La Chanteuse, the singing rock, an acute maritime danger formed, according to tradition, when a village girl was turned to stone for singing after marriage. Naïc sings her own 'final' song; Don Jacintho attempts to seduce her but, although confused and filled with foreboding, she sails with Yves to the lighthouse.

### **Act II**

Alone outside the lighthouse, Yves frets about his unconsummated marriage. The fishermen can be heard singing in the distance and Yves, encouraged by the perfidious Yann, leaves with them. Yann then brings Don Jacintho and leaves him alone at the lighthouse with Naïc. This time, Jacintho's seduction is successful. It is agreed that Yann will decoy the *gardien* from the lighthouse at night with a false distress signal and that, in his absence, Don Jacintho's boat will come to rescue Naïc.

### **Act III**

A storm rages. In the upper room of the lighthouse, Yves ignites the lamp. In the living quarters, he finds Naïc distractedly looking out of an open window. A distress signal is sounded and Yves apparently leaves to rescue the boat. However, he returns whilst Naïc is signalling to her lover from the gallery and extinguishes the light so that Don Jacintho's boat will founder. Although Naïc tries to sing a warning, the cries of the dying sailors can clearly be heard as the ship hits the rocks; in despair, she throws herself into the waves. Yves, grief-stricken, sets the wooden lighthouse alight and perishes.

## ***Magicienne de la mer***

### **Tableau I**

In a Breton seaside bar, the fishermen drink after a hard day's work. A drowned body is brought in. Dahut, the legendary Queen of Ys appears to transport the sailors to her magical city.



## **Tableau II**

In Dahut's palace, an orgy is in progress. Dahut's amorous attentions are focused on one sailor, Maël, but the captain of the boat opens the locks which protect the city from the sea and the waters sweep in as Dahut and Maël exchange passionate vows of love.

## **Tableau III**

As the sailors prepare to go to sea again, only Yannick remembers the 'dream' and Dahut's seductive spell.

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